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# THE TRIUMPH OF JILL

# The Triumph of Jill

By
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London
John Long
13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket
1903

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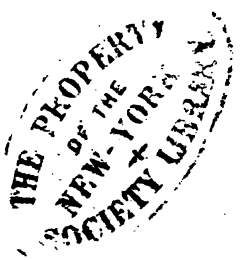

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# THE TRIUMPH OF JILL

## CHAPTER I

"Art," said the man, regarding lingeringly a half finished canvas standing on an easel in the middle of the poorly furnished room, and then the very insignificant little girl beside him, who had posed for him ever since she had dispensed with long clothes, and subsequently taken to them again, and had always proved an unsatisfactory model from an artistic point of view, "is the only thing really worth living for, and yet it's the most bally rotten thing to take up—as a bread winning profession, you understand. When you've got the

bread, and plenty of it, it's a very fine way of getting butter to it, and in exceptional cases preserves as well. I'm sorry," with a smothered sigh of regret, "that I didn't go in for something more satisfactory for your sake; I should have felt easier in my mind when it came to pegging out."

But the girl was enthusiastic upon the subject as well as himself.

"It was your life's work," she answered; "you could not have done otherwise."

"Perhaps you are right," he said, turning his head restlessly upon the cushion. "My life's work! And what a poor thing I have made of it. What a grind it has been, and what a failure."

"Don't, dear," she whispered, slipping her hand into his with a caressing, protecting gesture; "it hurts me to hear you. And after all there is nothing to regret. We have been very happy together, you and I; I wouldn't have had it different. If you had been more successful in a worldly sense we might

not have been all in all to one another as we have been. We have always managed to get along."

"Yes," he answered with a touch of masculine arrogance," it was all right so long as I was well, but I shall never finish that canvas, Jill, though I've forced myself to work to the last; but I'm pegging out fast now—two legs in the grave," with a flash of humour and the old light of mirth in his eyes again, "though I'm hanging on to the upper ground with both hands like the tenacious beggar I always was; but the sods are giving way, and I shall suddenly drop out of sight one day, and then—and then," the sad look coming back to his face, "you'll be left to fight the battle of life alone."

The girl's lip quivered, and she turned away her head to hide her emotion, fearful that any display of grief would hurt him, and sadden his last few hours on earth.

"I shall manage," she answered confidently, "I shall teach; you have often said

I was quite competent of doing that, and occasionally I sell my own work, you know."

"Yes," he said, "you have my talent, and I have taught you all I could. But I wish that I had more to leave you; there will be so little after all the expenses are paid."

"There are the models—my art school stocked," she replied with assumed cheerfulness. "I shall be only awaiting the pupils, and they will come after a while."

The speech was a brave one, but her heart sank nevertheless. She was fairly self-reliant, but she had seen enough of the seamy side of life to realise how difficult it was, added to which she was devoted to her father, who was all she had in the world, and the knowledge that he was leaving her just when she seemed to need him most was very bitter. They had been comrades ever since she could remember, a bond that had made the roving, Bohemian life very pleasant, and the severing of which meant a loss that nothing could ever replace—a void no one else could fill.

And yet she continued cheerful and bright, even gay at times, though each day found him weaker, and her own heart heavier, and more hopeless. But she choked down the lump that was always rising in her throat, and maintained a smiling exterior, despite her grief, until there was no need to conceal her feelings any longer, and then sorrow had its way, and found vent in a wild burst of uncontrollable weeping, which after half an hour exhausted both itself and her, and ended in a kind of general collapse. But there was very little time in which to indulge the luxury of grief. There was the future to think about; for it was necessary to live even if one did not feel greatly inclined to; and so Jill left her tiny bedroom with its sloping ceiling, and stole into the studio, bare, save for its model throne, and casts, its easel, table, and couple of cane-bottomed chairs, its smell of stale tobacco, and cheese, and the memory of the dear presence that once had sat there working and would work no more. With

eyes blinded by tears, and hands that trembled she proceeded to dust the models, and put the room to rights, and as she did so her glance fell upon the still unfinished picture —her father's last work—and, letting the dusting brush fall from her hand, she threw her arms about the neck of the Apollo Belvidere and wept afresh. Her next move, when this new outburst had subsided, was to take down the bust of Clytie from the shelf on which it stood and tenderly remove the specks of dust that had been allowed to gather there through the inevitable neglect of the past sad days. This had been her father's favourite model. He had liked it on account of a certain worldliness of expression —a touch of the old Eve, he had been wont to say—which the others lacked! and so henceforth Clytie would possess an added attraction, a new interest for her born of pure sentiment.

When she had arranged the room to her satisfaction she set about writing out her ad-

vertisement, no very lengthy matter, for she had thought about it so continually of late that she knew exactly how to word it. She had come to the conclusion that it would be better not to let people know that she was just starting, so expressed herself in a non-committal sort of way as follows :—"Miss Erskine's Art School will re-open on Jan: 15th. Classes, Tuesdays and Fridays 9.30—12.30 a.m., and 2.30—4.30 p.m., Geometry Classes every Wednesday evening from 7.30—9 o'clock." Then followed the address and date, and the advertisement was completed and ready to appear. So far everything was easy, but Jill herself felt by no means sanguine of results. For one thing the locality was not very desirable, and the Art School commanded what many people in house hunting insist upon, a lofty situation, but in the latter instance, of course, it has nothing to do with stairs. Miss Erskine's establishment was four storeys high, and the shape of the ceiling hinted unkindly at being in close com-

munication with the slates. Would anybody who was able to pay for tuition be willing to climb those stairs twice a week, narrow and steep, and dark enough to be dangerous, not to mention the dust, which the obscurity hid, but which one's olfactory organ detected unmistakably as one wended one's way wearily up or down? No, it did not seem very probable, and yet it was just possible enough to leave a margin of hope in her otherwise despondent reasoning.

The next day, Jill had the sorry satisfaction of seeing her advertisement in print. It was stuck away in a corner of one of the least important columns, and did not look very imposing, but it occasioned her a little thrill of pride all the same, and gave her fresh heart to return to work, though she had endeavoured to sell a small canvas that morning for a proportionally small sum and had failed, a fact, considering the state of her exchequer, not conducive to great exhilaration. Fortunately, the rent was settled for the next

six months, and she had still some funds in hand, and after that—well, something would turn up. For the sake of economy Jill sat at work with a jacket on and her back turned towards the empty grate, but the weather was particularly cold, and her hands became so numbed, that she could not hold the brushes; and on the third day she was obliged to give in and indulge in a fire again. Soon after that, she sold a picture and received a commission for another, which she set to work on at once; and for the first time since her father's death she felt almost light hearted. But fortune's wheel is seldom stationary long, and after she had completed the second canvas there seemed no further demand upon her energies. This was discouraging, but still she persevered, painting all morning, and spending the afternoons trying to sell her work, returning after nightfall, cold and weary to a dark, cheerless room, and creeping early to bed for the sake of warmth, and the saving of unnecessary illumination.

One morning as she sat at work in a by no means cheerful frame of mind, having made only a very scant breakfast, and unless she sold something that day, seeing but small chance of making a more substantial meal later on, she was interrupted by the sound of a footstep on the stairs, a blundering heavy footstep, that kicked each stair it mounted, and finally came down with a stamp at the top, having taken a step too many in the gloom of a fourth storey landing. It was enough to try anybody's temper, and the owner of the footstep said "damn!" audibly enough to reach Miss Erskine's ear as she sat before her easel. She rose as promptly as though he had knocked and opened the door. She had climbed those stairs so often herself that she found it easy to make allowances. Not for one moment did she suppose that the visit was intended for her,—it was a mistake that had happened before, but not often; as a rule people preferred to make those mistakes lower down,—neither did it cross her mind

to imagine that it might mean pupils; she had given up all hope of anything in that line, had almost forgotten the poor little advertisement that she had felt so proud to read in print; it seemed so long ago since it had been written; and yet it was not quite three weeks. A young man stood outside in the narrow passage at the head of the stairs, a big young man—disproportionately big he appeared to Jill, but that was only because his surroundings were disproportionately cramped. He was in reality a very fine young man, with a good deal of muscular development, and a pair of long legs. He was not seen to advantage just at that moment for he was looking decidedly out of humour, and his brows were drawn together over his eyes until he appeared to scowl. He bowed gravely on seeing Jill, and his face relaxed a little.

"I beg your pardon," he began, but Jill cut him short.

"Don't mention it," she answered promptly.

"I wasn't surprised in the least; I have felt that way myself sometimes—just at first, you know."

He stared rather. Not being acquainted with the quality and thickness of the lath and plaster of that locality, he did not connect her speech with the mild ejaculation that had apprised her of the fact that he had reached the top, and had mounted those stairs for the first time, and he rather inclined to the belief that he had chanced upon a lunatic.

"I was informed that Miss Erskine lives here," he continued, glancing at the palette and mhalstick in her hand, which in her haste she had forgotten to put down. Instantly she perceived that he had not followed her train of thought, and regretted her former speech. Then she said "Oh!" because she did not know what else to say, and felt glad that she had a fire.

"Won't you come inside?" she asked.

He took her for one of Miss Erskine's pupils, and followed her in silence. She

shut the door behind him, and then he saw that there was no one else in the room.

"The—the servant,"—he had narrowly escaped saying 'slavey'—"told me to come straight up," he went on explanatorily, "she said Miss Erskine was in. Can I see her if she is not engaged?"

Jill smiled a little bitterly. Engaged!

"I am Miss Erskine," she answered with a touch of dignity that sat very quaintly on her, for she was small, and, in her black dress with the big white painting apron falling straight from the yoke like a child's pinafore, looked ridiculously school-girlish and young; in addition to which she wore her hair in a plait, the end doubled underneath and tied with a black velvet bow. No wonder that he had taken her for a pupil.

The information seemed to surprise him, and he regarded her somewhat dubiously for a moment. Then he bowed.

"I am fortunate to find you disengaged." he said.

"*I* should be fortunate if you had found me otherwise," Jill answered ruefully, but he did not smile; probably he considered her flippant.

"I read your advertisement in the paper a short while since," he continued gravely, "and came to—" he hesitated, and glanced round the room till his eye fell upon the canvas on which she was engaged, and the sight of it seemed to decide him, "to enquire your terms. I wish to study art."

Jill gasped. She had never connected him for a moment with the advertisement; this was not the sort of applicant that she had expected at all; the mere idea of teaching this dreadfully big young man appalled her. Apparently the incongruity of the situation did not appeal to him, or perhaps he was too much engrossed with the main object to think of anything else; for he went on quite coolly as though her acceptance of him as a pupil were a foregone conclusion.

"I have long wanted to take up art as a

hobby for leisure moments, but I have never had the pluck to go to one of the big studios as I know absolutely nothing, and I'm not quite sure, dubiously, whether I have much talent that way."

"That is soon proved," she answered. "But you will never do anything at it if you intend only to make a 'hobby' of it."

He smiled.

"You think the term ill-advised?" he said.

"I think it inapplicable."

"And when shall I come?" he asked. "To-morrow?"

"Good gracious, no!" she exclaimed vehemently; then checked herself and continued in a slightly apologetic tone, "That is I mean if you will leave your address I will write. I must have a little while in which to decide."

"Certainly," he replied, and he took out a card and laid it on the table, and the next thing Miss Erskine knew was, that she was

bowing her visitor out, and keeping the studio door obligingly open to light him down to the next landing. There was no more work for her that morning; she sat in front of the fire with his card in her hand, and went over the interview in her mind till she laughed aloud. On the card was engraved in neat copper plate, "Mr. John St. John, 13 Bedford Square," and below that again was another address at Henley. Evidently Mr. St. John was fairly well to do. And he wished to dabble in art. Well, why shouldn't he? Jill could see no reason why he shouldn't, but she saw a great many why she should not be his instructress. It was a great temptation nevertheless; she was badly in want of money for one thing, but on the other hand he was so tremendously big that the thought of undertaking him as a pupil filled her with a strange shyness. She felt that she could not do it, and determined to write and tell him so. As luck would have it that after-

noon she sold three canvasses. They did not fetch much it is true, still it was something, and the dealer further intimated that he would be glad of more work from her in the future. This was encouraging, and Jill went home in the best of spirits. That night she wrote to Mr. St. John stating as briefly as possible that she regretted any inconvenience to which he had been put, but on consideration she discovered that she could not possibly take any fresh pupils just at present. Then she tossed his card into the fire with a sigh of relief, and, watching it consume, saw the last, as she supposed, of Mr. John St. John.

The next day she did not go out at all, but sat at home working busily, and endeavouring her hardest not to think with regret of last night's now irrevocable decision. What a pity it was that instead of Mr. St. John it had not been some lanky school girl with short dresses and a pigtail; it would have been so nice to have

someone to talk to occasionally. At present her conversation was restricted to the man who bought her pictures, and the hard-worked, lodging-house slavey on the not too numerous occasions when she brought up the coals. The following afternoon she went out as usual to try and get a few fresh orders, and if possible sell some of her present work. Neither attempt however proved successful, and she arrived home tired and worried with a distinct disinclination to climb the stairs. The ascent had to be made nevertheless, and so she trudged wearily up, and pushed open the studio door with a long drawn sigh of sheer fatigue. That night she crept into bed supperless because she did not feel hungry, and as a natural sequence cried herself to sleep.

## CHAPTER II

THE following morning Jill received another visit. It was a case of history repeating itself so to speak. She was seated in much the same attitude as on the former occasion, only this time she waited and allowed the visitor to stumble up the stairs as best he could and knock before she rose to open the door. It was the same quick blundering step, and, when she confronted him, the same slightly scowling face that met her glance; apparently Mr. St. John did not find the stairs less intricate on further acquaintance. He held his hat in his hand and Jill noticed that he looked rather diffident.

"You got my note?" she queried with

a clearly perceptible inflection of surprise in her voice.

"Yes," he answered. "that is why I am here. I must apologise, though, for calling on your class day. As a matter of fact I came yesterday afternoon but found I had just missed you ; you were out."

"Yes," she replied, "I was out, but I never heard that you had been. It was courageous of you to attempt those stairs a second time. Will you come in?"

He entered, and then looked round in surprise. The room was just the same as on the former occasion unoccupied save by themselves and with no visible preparation for anyone else. Jill detected the look and resented it.

"You are wondering where my pupils are," she said quickly, "I am expecting—no," with a proud upraising of her small chin, "I am *not* expecting—How could I expect anyone to mount those stairs?—I am *hoping* that some may turn up eventually."

"And yet," he said in a distinctly offended tone, "you refuse the first who presents himself. But perhaps you mistrusted my claim to respectability?"

Jill blushed uncomfortably. She had forgotten for the moment that she had refused him as a pupil on the ground of having no vacancy.

"It—it isn't that," she tried to explain. "I can quite believe that you are *very* respectable but—Oh! can't you understand?—I wanted to teach children?"

Apparently he did not consider that sufficient reason to preclude her from teaching him also; he did not seem to think that there might be other reasons which had led up to this—to him—very trivial one.

"I don't know any more than a child would," he replied, "and I should pay three times the fee—double for being an adult, treble for being a male adult which some ladies seem to consider an additional inconvenience."

"Excuse me," put in Jill severely, "if I undertook to teach you my charge would be the same for you as for any other pupil, but I am afraid I must decline."

"Very well," he answered huffily, "the decision of course rests with you, but I won't attempt to disguise the fact that I am very disappointed."

He walked towards the door, but stopped, and came back a little way.

"If it is anything to do with—that is I mean to say—I will pay in advance," he blurted out.

The girl bit her lip.

"It has nothing to do with that," she cried sharply. "Oh, dear me, how very dense you are! Don't you see that it wouldn't do for me to teach you?"

He stared at her.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "you don't mean to say that you're afraid of Mrs. Grundy? She would never get up those stairs I can assure you, and if she did why

we'd stick her on the model throne and paint her."

Jill laughed in spite of herself. It sounded very ridiculous put into plain English, and yet after all he had pretty well hit upon the truth.

"It isn't only Mrs. Grundy," she replied, "but I—I don't feel equal to undertaking you. I think it would be better if you went to someone—older."

"When I read your advertisement," he said stiffly, "I imagined that you would be older. But I don't see that it much matters. I want to study art. You wish to teach it and have no other pupils. Why not try me for a quarter and see how it works?"

It was a great temptation, Jill still hesitated. Absurd as she felt it to be she was unmistakably nervous at the thought of teaching this big young man, while he, noting her indecision, stood waiting anxiously for her to speak, too engrossed with his project to consider her at all; she merely represented a means to an end, the object through which

he might accomplish the only real ambition of his life.

"I don't know," she said slowly after a long pause, "I think perhaps I might try as you suggest, for the quarter but—I wish you had been a girl."

"Thank you," he answered. "I am sorry that I cannot agree with you. Shall I stay this morning?"

Jill looked rather alarmed at this proposal, but, she reasoned within herself, if he were coming at all he might as well begin at once, so, after another long pause, and a dubious look round the none too tidy studio, she gave an ungracious assent, whereupon he immediately commenced divesting himself of his overcoat, an action he regretted when it was too late, and, but for fear of hurting her feelings, he would have slipped into it again for the fire was nearly out and the room struck chill; he wondered how she sat there painting with her small hands almost blue with cold,

"The servant," explained Jill airily with the astuteness of a very observant nature, "will be here with the coals shortly; she usually brings them up at about eleven."

He looked rather disconcerted.

"Oh, I'm not cold in the least," he exclaimed untruthfully, "it is quite warm to-day."

"Yes," replied the girl shortly, "the thermometer is below Zero, I should say. Will you sit here please?"

She placed him as near the fire as possible and provided him with drawing-materials, then going over to a shelf began to rummage among endless books and papers for a suitable copy simple enough for him to start on.

"I wish to go in for the figure from life," he modestly observed.

Jill fairly gasped at his audacity; she had understood him to say that he was a novice.

"How much," she asked, pausing in her

search and regarding him critically the while she put the question, "or how little drawing did I understand you to say you had done up to the present?"

"I haven't done any," he answered meekly.

Jill went on with her search again.

"We will commence with flat copies," she crushingly remarked, after that we will attempt the cast, and then—but there is ample time in which to think about such lofty aspirations."

Mr. St. John was not the mildest tempered of mortals but he sat mute under the rebuff and took the copy which she handed him without comment. It was an easy outline of a woman's head, absurdly easy the new pupil considered it, and yet, to use his own vulgar phraseology after he had been working laboriously for ten minutes and had succeeded in rubbing a hole in the paper where the prominent feature should have been, it stumped him. Miss Erskine rose and stood over him

with a disagreeable, I-told-you-so expression on her face.

"I can hardly accuse you of idleness," she said, "you have been most energetic as the paper evinces. I think we had better start again on a fresh piece."

She fetched another sheet of drawing paper and, taking the seat he had vacated, pinned it on the board, while he stood behind her, his brows drawn together in the old scowl, and a gleam of angry resentment in his eyes.

"The paper," Jill continued in measured cutting tones, "was not wasted; it has served its purpose; for you have learnt your first lesson in art. It is a useful lesson, too, as it applies to other things that are worth mastering. The will to accomplish a thing is not the accomplishment, remember; it is necessary to the accomplishment, of course, but one must work hard, fight against difficulty, and defeat defeat. Now that you have acknowledged the difficulty we will see what we can do to overcome it."

The young man stared at her with, it must be confessed, a certain amount of vexed amusement in his gaze. He wondered what sort of an old woman she would be, and finally decided that she would develop into an acidulated spinster.

"If you will kindly give me your attention," she began with the new dignity which was so unbecoming to her, and so very unpleasant to her pupil, "I will—"

But here an interruption occurred in the welcome sound of someone mounting the stairs, followed by much shuffling and the flop of something heavy outside the door.

"Coals!" purred Jill with evident relief, and then he noticed that she was shivering slightly.

"Come in," she cried.

The shuffling re-continued but instead of the appearance of the coals the sound merely heralded a retreat, whoever it was had commenced the descent, of that there could be no shadow of a doubt. Jill sprang up and went

to the door, and St. John heard her remonstrating at some length with a person named Isobel, an obdurate person seemingly, and one who used the expression aint a good deal, and found some difficulty with her aspirates. After a long and subdued warfare of words the shuffling feet recommenced their descent, and then the door flew open and Miss Erskine appeared dragging in the scuttle. St. John strode swiftly to her assistance but Jill waved him peremptorily back.

"Thank you," she said, "I can manage; it is not at all heavy."

"No," he answered, giving her a straight look as he grasped the handle, "not more than quarter of a ton I should say. Allow me if you please."

Jill released her hold and watched him with limp resignation; that deft usage of her own weapons had been too much for her. It was ungenerous of him, she considered, and to do him justice he was rather of the same opinion.

"There!" he exclaimed, as he threw on fresh coals, and, going down on his knees, raked out the dead ashes from the lower bars, "it will soon burn up now. Had the cold upset Isobel's equilibrium too?"

It was an unlucky slip, but fortunately for his own peace of mind, Mr. St. John did not notice the offensive and unnecessary little word at the end of his query, nor, having his back towards her, could he see Jill's quick flush of annoyance.

"I don't understand you," she answered curtly.

"I beg your pardon," he remarked, nettled by her tone. "I hope you don't think me impertinent; but I thought there had been a little difficulty about bringing in the coals."

"So there was," she replied, and smiled involuntarily at the recollection. Then she glanced at her art student as he knelt upon the hearth, and from him to the models showing up white and still against the dingy curtain which formed their background; Mars

Borghese, the Apollo Belvidere, the Venus de Medici, and a smaller figure of the Venus de Milo; a good collection, a collection which both she and her father had loved and been proud of, and which had taken many years to gather together.

"You were the cause," she continued, bringing her gaze back again to the kneeling figure in front of the grate; "Isobel's modesty would not permit her to enter the studio with a strange man present; ignorance is always self-conscious, you know."

He gave her a quick look.

"I am sorry," he said, "to have been the innocent cause of so much perturbation. Hadn't you better arrange with the Abigail to bring the coals a little earlier?"

Jill shook her head, but she was still smiling.

"You forget," she said, "that I'm only the attics; it is a favour that I get them brought at all. I fear it will end in your always having to carry them in if you won't let me;

that and the stairs will soon put to flight your desire for studying art."

He got up, and bending, began to dust the ash off his clothes with angry vehemence. Did she wish to annoy him, or was it merely that she was cursed with a particularly disagreeable manner? Jill feigned not to note his displeasure, but, returning to the table, resumed her seat and went on with the lesson as though there had been no interruption, explaining and illustrating her remarks with the care and precision that she remembered her father to have used when first instructing her. Mr. St. John listened with grave attention; he was at any rate unaffectedly interested in the matter in hand, and had, if not the talent, an unmistakable love for art. When she relinquished the seat he took it and made a second, and this time less futile attempt. It is true that his drawing bore so little resemblance to the copy that it could not possibly be taken for the same head, nevertheless it was a wonderful creation in the

artist's eyes, and possessed a power and boldness of conception which the original lacked, he considered. He put his idea into words, and again Miss Erskine marvelled at his audacity.

"Not bad, is it?" he queried in a tone the self-complacency of which he did not even attempt to disguise. "I strengthened it a bit—thought it would be an improvement, don't you know."

"Yes," agreed Jill, regarding his work with dubious appreciation, "character in a face is greatly to be desired."

He nodded approvingly.

"I'm glad you think that," he remarked with increasing satisfaction; "but of course you would."

"Of course. And, after all, a few inches on to one's nose hardly signifies, does it? not to mention a jaw that no woman ever possessed outside a show. Your drawing puts me in mind of somebody or other's criticism on Pope's translation of Homer—

'a very pretty story, Mr. Pope, but it is not Homer.' Yours is a very wonderful creation, Mr. St. John, but it in no wise resembles the copy."

St. John glared.

"I thought you said you admired character?" he exclaimed.

"So I do; and there is a great deal of character in the original, I consider; but if you wish for a candid opinion, I think your head is simply a masculine monstrosity. But, come, you need not look so angry; we do not win our spurs at the first charge, you know. Must I praise your failures as well as your successes, eh?"

"You don't think me quite such a conceited fool, I hope," he said somewhat deprecatingly, though he still looked a little dissatisfied and aggrieved. "I only meant that it wasn't altogether bad for a first attempt."

But it was not Jill's intention to flatter.

"It isn't altogether *good* for a first attempt," she said.

"You are not very encouraging," he remarked a trifle reproachfully. "Had you been my pupil and I had said so much—"

"I should have thought you very disagreeable," she interrupted, laughing.

He laughed also; for despite her contrariety her mirth was most infectious, and put him more at ease with her. It was the first glimpse of her natural self that she had vouchsafed him, and he liked it infinitely better than the half-aggressive dignity she assumed in her capacity of teacher.

"Do you think," he ventured again after a pause, and with a decided increase of diffidence, "that I am likely to be any good at it?"

Jill took up a pencil and penknife with the intent to sharpen the former but laid them down again suddenly and looked him squarely in the face.

"If you mean have you any talent for art?" she said coolly, "I am afraid I cannot give you much encouragement. You have a

liking for it, and, I should say, possess a certain amount of perseverance; therefore in time you ought to turn out some fairly decent work, but you have not talent."

He looked displeased, and fell to contemplating his work anew from the distinctly irritating standpoint of its not being quite such a success as he had deemed it.

"You are very candid," he remarked, not altogether gratefully; "I suppose I should feel obliged to you. But, to be frank in my turn, you would do well not to be quite so candid with your pupils; you will never get on if you are."

She laughed, and shrugged her shoulders with a careless, half-bitter gesture.

"Your advice is rather superfluous," she answered; "I am not likely to get any pupils."

"Why not?" he queried. "You have one."

"Very true," she replied, "I had not forgotten that; it is too gigantic a fact to be

overlooked. Nevertheless, as I believe I remarked before, the coals and the stairs are likely to prove too great odds; facts—even gigantic ones—have a way of vanishing before great personal discomfort."

He reached down his overcoat and thrust his arms into the sleeves without passing any comment on her last remark; there was such an extreme possibility, not in the stairs, or the coals, but in herself proving too much for him that he refrained from contradicting her. Jill watched him busily without appearing to do so until he was ready to go, and stood, hat in hand, apparently undecided whether to shake hands or no.

"Good morning," she said, and bowed in so distant a manner, that, regretting his former indecision, he bowed back, and turning round went out with an equally brief salutation.

When he had gone Jill sat down in his seat and fell to studying his work.

"'Shall I be any good at it?'" she

mimicked, and then she laughed aloud. "'Do you think that I am likely to be any good at it?' No, I do not, Mr. St. John, I don't indeed."

## CHAPTER III

When St. John left the studio it was with so sore a feeling of resentment against Miss Erskine that it seemed to him most unlikely that he would ever re-enter it. It was not that he disliked her; he did not, but he had an uncomfortable conviction that she disliked him, and felt aggrieved at his presence even while she suffered it on account of the fee. He remembered with some vexation that he had almost forced her into accepting him as a pupil, for poor as she undoubtedly was she had plainly evinced that she had no desire to instruct him. Never mind, he would atone for his persistence by sending her his cheque and troubling the studio no more; that at any rate would show her that he had no wish to intrude. This decision being final he dis-

missed the matter from his mind, and, as a proof of the consistency of human nature, on Friday morning at the specified hour he stood on the dirty steps outside Miss Erskine's lodgings knocking with his walking-stick on the knockerless door. The modest Isobel opened it after a wait of some five minutes—minutes in which he had time to recall his past determination and to wonder at himself for having so speedily altered his mind—and having opened it startled him considerably by firing at him without giving him time for speech the vague yet all comprehensive information.

"She's hout."

"Miss Erskine?" he queried in very natural astonishment.

"Yus; been gone over 'arf a nour."

"But," remonstrated St. John, "the Art School opens at half past nine, it is after that now."

"Carnt 'elp it, she's hout."

"It is a very strange procedure," he

exclaimed in visible annoyance. "I come to the Art School at the hour it should open and Miss Erskine is out."

"Well!" snapped the damsel waxing impatient in her turn, "wot of that? The Art School aint hout, is it? You can go up if yer want to."

The permission was not very gracious but St. John accepted it nevertheless, and striding past her into the narrow passage began the ascent. He had not mounted two stairs however, before the slip shod Isobel called him back, and he noticed with surprise that her manner was altogether different, her tone softer, and in the obscurity of the dingy passage she looked less dirty and untidy.

"Ere's the key," she said, holding it towards him. He advanced his hand but immediately her own was withdrawn and thrust behind her.

"Wouldn't yer like to git it?" she said.

He mildly answered that he would and stood waiting expectantly, but she made no

move unless a facial contortion could come under such heading.

"Then take it," she returned with arch playfulness, and a broad grin, but still she kept her hand behind her and stared up in his face with impudent meaning, and a leer that was evidently intended to be captivating. He understood her perfectly but his mood did not fit in with hers; to do Mr. St. John bare justice he was rather above that sort of thing, and he remained stationary with one hand grasping the greasy banister, and one foot on the lowest stair. The girl gave it up then, and with another grimace, and a little scornful giggle approached him with the key held at arm's length between a grimy finger and thumb.

"'Ere greeny," she said, then laughed again as he took it from her with a word of thanks and turned to go upstairs, "I don't wonder Miss Herskine went out," she said. But St. John went on feigning not to hear though a flush of annoyance dyed his cheek,

and he had rather the appearance of a man who with difficulty restrained a swear.

When he opened the studio door the first thing that struck him was its untidiness, the next, that the fire was out, two facts which filled him with an irritating sense of discomfort and half inclined him to return whence he came ; but for the desire to occasion Miss Erskine some slight embarrassment and thwart her plans by remaining, he assuredly would have done so. That the fire had been lighted that morning was evident, he discovered on closer inspection, by a thin line of smoke still issuing from the seemingly dead embers ; it had not been purposely omitted then but had gone out for want of attention. The knowledge appeased his wrath somewhat, and feeling more disposed to remain he drew a chair up to the table and looked round for his drawing board with the intention of commencing work before Miss Erskine returned. The board stood against the wall with a fresh sheet of paper stretched ready for use,

but there was no copy, so going over to the shelf from which Jill had taken the former one he commenced turning it over in search of another. He did not find what he wanted, however, because before doing so he tumbled accidently upon what he was not looking for, what he had never dreamed of finding there, and what, when he had found it, caused him anything but pleasure. It was, in short, a very clever, and considering the length of the acquaintance a very impertinent sketch of himself. He had not seen her doing it, but there could be no doubt who was responsible for the thing, besides he knew the writing at the bottom of the sketch—small legible writing that he had seen on one other occasion in the curt little note which had refused him as a pupil. She must have drawn him while he sat working, and had achieved an admirable likeness, indeed as a specimen of artistic skill the caricature—for such it was—was perfect. The whole thing was not larger than a cabinet photograph,

just the head as far as the shoulders with eyes downcast, and an absurdly exaggerated rapture of expression on the face. The height of his collar had also been exaggerated and above the bent head encircling his brow was a nimbus. Beneath the drawing Miss Erskine had scribbled, 'Saint John the Beloved,' and St. John looked at it, and failing to appreciate the unmistakable talent it betrayed stood scowling at his own portrait. How long he remained thus he knew not, but the next thing he was aware of was the opening of the studio door, and Miss Erskine herself appeared while he still stood there with the drawing in his hand. She looked pale and hurried, and was panting a little as if she had been walking very fast. She bowed to St John, and glanced from him to the drawing board, and then back again to the paper in his hand.

"I am so sorry that you should have found me out," she exclaimed; "I started early with the intention of being back in time, but—

well accidents will happen, won't they? It was unfortunate but I am glad to see that you were going to begin without me. Have you found a copy?"

"Yes," he answered coolly, keeping his glance fixed full upon her face, "a Biblical one; but I am afraid it is rather beyond me."

He held it towards her, and, all unconscious of what it was, she took it from him, glanced at it, then bent her head lower to conceal her features and the vivid blush which overspread her face.

"It's—it's decidedly beyond you," she said, and there was a note of defiance in her voice, he even fancied that he detected a ring of laughter in it also, but that might have been his imagination.

"Yes," he agreed, "so I thought."

"It's very strange but it seems to me to be a little—a little like—you," she continued, and then she raised her eyes to scan his face looking from him to the sketch and back again with her head on one side and a gleam of

mischievous amusement in her glance. Evidently she intended braving it out; though it was easily seen that she was feeling both awkward and uncomfortable.

"Not a little," he corrected, "but *very much* like me."

"Ah! so you perceive it also? Yes, it *is* very much like you. Strange! I wonder how it got there?"

"So do I," he answered dryly. "It is also a case for speculation how your handwriting got on the bottom of the paper."

"Why, so it is, 'Saint John the Beloved,' whose beloved, I wonder, that's a case for speculation also."

She tossed the sketch on to the table and stood facing him with such an assured, audacious air that he could find nothing to say, so fell to scowling again in lieu of any verbal expression of his opinion concerning her. She had perfect control of herself now, and meant to give him no further satisfaction, indeed she was vexed to know that he had

managed to confuse her at all; but it had been such an altogether unexpected contre-temps and had taken her so entirely aback. She smiled at the angry young man, and began slowly pulling off her gloves.

"If you wish to copy that, Mr. St. John," she began, "you are welcome to make the attempt, but it is rather advanced. I should advise you to give your attention to something simpler."

As she finished speaking she turned to a portfolio against the wall and abstracted thence a series of heads in outline, showing the method of working. These she placed on the table before him and ran through a brief explanation of the method, and how he should follow it, while he watched her in gloomy silence, and reluctantly admired the easy mastery with which she sketched in the first head for him to see.

"There," she exclaimed, "now you know how to go on so I will leave you for a moment while I go and take off my outdoor things."

She disappeared behind the old green curtain partitioning off a part of the room that had served her father for a sleeping apartment, and was now kept as a dressing-room but seldom used, and from thence into the tiny chamber which she called her bedroom. When she returned, in the big studio apron that he had first seen her in, she found St. John very deeply engrossed; he did not even glance up as she appeared, but bending his head lower over his board went diligently on with his work. The sketch of himself, she noticed, had vanished but hardly had she time to regret this fact before her attention was caught by the fireless grate which on her first entry, heated with her rapid walk, and enveloped in a thick jacket had escaped her observation. Seeing it now she turned to him with a very injured air.

"Why, you've let the fire out," she said reproachfully.

"I beg your pardon," he answered stiffly, "it was out when I arrived."

Jill bit her lip and walked swiftly across the room to the fireplace. There were sticks and paper in a cupboard beside it, and, getting some out, she knelt down before the hearth and commenced laying the fire anew.

"I beg *your* pardon," she said somewhat crestfallen. "It happened, I suppose, through my being out so much longer than I intended; but that was quite an accident, and not my fault at all. I hope you will excuse all this inconvenience."

"Don't mention it," he exclaimed, "the inconvenience is greater for you than for me."

He glanced round as he spoke and watched her while she began to arrange the sticks.

Something struck him as unusual about her, and after a time he discovered what it was, she was working with one hand, the right one, and on the left wrist was a very neat and very new looking bandage. In a moment all his resentment against her vanished, the caricature was forgotten, and with it her former ungraciousness of manner.

He recalled how pale and weary she had looked on entering, and how he had endeavoured to embarrass her by showing her what he had found. He rose and joined her where she knelt upon the hearth.

"Excuse me," he began in a slightly apologetic tone, "I see that you have hurt your wrist; won't you let me do that for you?"

"Thank you," she answered, "but I can manage very well; it is nothing—much."

The much was a concession to conscience, and was thrown in with an unwilling jerk at the end. Then he did a very bold thing; he went down on his knees beside her and took the sticks out of her hand.

"I'm a don hand at building up fires," he said; "there's never any difficulty about my fires burning."

"I should think not," replied Jill, watching the reckless way in which he threw on the sticks; "a fire that wouldn't burn with all that wood ought to be ashamed of itself. Mr. St. John, please; you'll ruin me."

St. John desisted then and put on coals instead, piling them up with an equally lavish hand; then he struck a match and set light to the erection which was soon blazing and cracking merrily.

"I told you so," he cried triumphantly looking up at her as she stood a little behind him regarding with a somewhat rueful smile the very unnecessary extravagance. "That will be as hot as blazes before long. Come a little nearer; you look cold."

He fetched her a chair and Jill sat down and held her hands to the warmth. She was cold—cold, and tired, and shaken. Her head ached badly too, and all the fight seemed taken out of her; she could only sit there enjoying the rest, experiencing the pleasurable novelty of being waited upon, and of having someone to talk to again.

"And now," exclaimed St. John, taking his stand before her with his grimy hands held at awkward angles from his clothes, "tell me how you managed to hurt yourself. Is it a sprain?"

"I don't know what it is, a mere scratch, I think," she answered. "It happened when I was out this morning."

"Indeed! an accident then?"

His tone was sympathetic and interested. Jill expanded further.

"Yes," she replied, sinking her chin in the palm of her right hand and resting her elbow on her knee. "A female horror on wheels rode over me."

"What, a cyclist?"

Jill nodded.

"You don't approve of biking then?"

"Oh! I don't know," she answered. "I suppose I should if I had one of my own.* It isn't the machine that I'm disparaging now but the rider. Some people seem to think that the metropolis belongs to them, and that you ought to apply to them for the privilege of residing in it. She was one of that sort."

"But it was not purposely done?"

"No, I suppose not, as it occasioned her the great inconvenience of stepping off into the

mud, but it was sheer carelessness all the same. I was crossing the road, and it was a case of being run over by a hansom, or biked over; I preferred the latter."

"Did you find out who she was?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Jill, feeling in her pocket. "I have her card. She was very gracious, and wished me to apply to her if I wanted money, hinting delicately at a doctor's fee, or something of the sort. I took her card out of curiosity, and walked into the nearest chemists', having the satisfaction of hearing her say to someone as I went, that she would see that I had compensation, poor girl! so stupid to have run right in front of her wheel."

"Prig!" muttered St. John.

"There's the card. You can throw it into the fire when you've done with it; I shall make no application."

He took it from her, glanced at it, and then gave vent to an involuntary exclamation of surprise. Jill looked up.

"You know the name?" she questioned.

"Rather!"

"A friend of yours?"

"Well—yes, I suppose so; she's a sort of connection."

Jill compressed her mouth, and stared fixedly at the fire; the situation was a little awkward.

"Being a relation of yours," she began in a slightly strained voice, "I'm sorry that I said what I did, but—well, you yourself, called her a prig, didn't you?"

"Yes," he admitted, and then he tore the card in two, angrily, and threw it into the flames.

"She couldn't, perhaps, have avoided the accident," Jill went on, "and she meant to be kind, but she doesn't possess much tact."

"No," he agreed, "she doesn't. "You must allow me to apologise for her. After all there is some slight excuse for her gaucherie; she has been spoilt with a superabundance of this world's goods—quarter of a million of

money is rather inclined to blunt the finer sensibilities."

"Quarter of a million!" gasped Jill. "Oh, dear me, I would like the chance of having my finer sensibilities blunted."

She laughed a little, but St. John was looking so gloomy that her mirth died away almost as soon as it had risen.

"Come!" she said, jumping up. "I will get you some water to wash your hands, and then we must go to work; it will never do to waste a whole morning like this."

He allowed her to go without hindrance, and when quite alone stood glaring at the charred embers of Miss Bolton's card.

"Just like Evie," he soliloquised. "That girl is always making a blithering idiot of herself, though I—H'm! I wonder what little Miss Erskine would say if she knew that I—"

He broke off abruptly and kicked savagely at an inoffensive lump of coal lying near to his boot left there by his own carelessness when making the fire.

"Oh, hang it!" he mentally ejaculated, "what a confounded ass I am."

"The water and soap are on the table," said Jill's voice at his elbow, such a small friendly voice, so very different from her former tone—the tone that was always associated in his mind in connection with her—that he turned and faced her involuntarily, looking down at her with a smile.

"It is awfully good of you to trouble," he said. "I am afraid that I and my relations are putting you to a lot of bother."

"By no means," she answered, with a return to her former distance of voice and manner. "When a student of mine soils his hands in my service, the least I can do is to provide him with the means of cleansing them again."

St. John immediately retreated within himself, and taking the towel which she offered him, walked over to the table. When he had finished his ablutions, Miss Erskine removed the basin, while he took his former seat and

quietly resumed work. The rest of the time passed pretty well in silence, Miss Erskine's manner continuing as distant as ever. In all likelihood she would have bowed him out as before, had he not boldly put hesitation on one side, and marching straight up to her held out his hand. Jill, in unwilling acquiescence, placed hers in it.

"You mustn't treat me altogether as a stranger," he said. "Because we are teacher and pupil it doesn't follow that we need be enemies also. Good morning, Miss Erskine; believe me, I am sincerely sorry for the injury that you have received."

Jill smiled and a gleam of mischief shone in her eyes.

"I seem to have received so many this morning that I hardly know which you mean," she said. "Do you allude to the hurt wrist or the very ungenerous manner in which you greeted me on my return?"

He coloured a little. Then he laughed.

"I was rather wild," he admitted. "Saint

John with my face, twentieth century get-up, and a nimbus, was a bit too much."

"Indeed! I thought it rather clever," Jill modestly remarked.

"Clever, yes; so it was, no doubt. If it hadn't been so clever, it wouldn't have been so annoying."

"It has gone!" she cried, glancing at the table, though she knew already that it was not there. "You are not taking it with you?"

"Yes," he answered coolly, "I am."

"But, Mr. St. John," she remonstrated, "I think that I have some claim to my own work."

"But, Miss Erskine," he retorted, "I think that I have some claim to my own portrait."

"Well, never mind," said Jill." "I can sketch it again if I want to."

"Yes," he replied, "but I don't think you will."

"Perhaps not. I am not fond of wasting my time; it is too precious."

St. John laughed and took up his hat.

"Good-bye again," he said. "I hope by the next time I come that the hand will be quite well."

"Thank you," she answered. "I hope it will."

He had not been gone half an hour when a most unusual thing occurred—unusual, that is, for number 144. It was, indeed, an unprecedented event within the memory of the present owners of the establishment, and quite a shock to the slovenly Isobel who opened the door to the very peremptory knock. It was, in short, a florist's messenger with a large and magnificent basket of hot-house flowers for Miss Erskine. Not being the locality for such dainty gifts, it was not surprising that, to quote Isobel verbatim, it struck her all of a heap. She carried the basket up to the studio, another unusual event; on the very rare occasions when a parcel arrived for Miss Erskine it was left on the dirty hall-table until she descended in quest of it. But Isobel's feminality detected sentiment amid

the fragrant scent of the delicate blossoms, and the vulgar side of her nature was all on the alert. No doubt she expected Miss Erskine to be equally excited and curious with herself, but Miss Erskine was not in the habit of gratifying other people at her own expense. She was standing in front of her easel roughly sketching with a piece of charcoal when Isobel bounced into the room, and only paused in her occupation to give a very casual glance at the flowers, and to evince some surprise at sight of them, and still more at having them brought up.

"One would think that I was a first floor lodger," she exclaimed, turning back to her work again, "instead of merely the attics. You'll be charging me for attendance soon, Isobel, if it goes on at this rate. Put it down on the table, please."

Isobel looked distinctly disappointed.

"But you ain't looked at 'em yet," she said.

"I've seen flowers before," Jill answered.

They look very pretty and smell nice; but they'll soon die in this turpentine atmosphere."

"Then you can keep the barskit," giggled the other. "I expect 'e thought o' that; 'e aint so green as I took 'im to be. Fancy you 'avin' a young man, Miss Herskine!"

Jill did look round then, and her glance was withering in the extreme.

"Explain your meaning, please," she said. "I don't understand jests like those."

"It aint no jest," replied Isobel somewhat abashed but grinning still despite the snub. "I didn't mean no 'arm neither, only," edging toward the door and preparing for flight, "when a gent takes to sendin' flowers it's like when the lodgers begins complainin' o' the charges—the beginnin' of the hend, so to speak."

The studio door slammed on her retreating figure, and her footsteps could be heard asserting themselves triumphantly in her descent—verily some people are born to make

a noise in the world! Jill listened to them until they reached the next landing, then she laid down her charcoal and approached the table. For a minute she stood motionless regarding the flowers, then she smiled a little and bending forward drew out from among them a card though she hardly needed that to tell her from whom they came. "With Saint John's compliments,' she read, and the smile on her lips widened untll it broadened into a laugh.

"If all your relations possessed the same amount of tact," she soliloquised, "what a model family yours would be."

She laid her face against the flowers and laughed again, a soft quiet laugh full of enjoyment.

"What a bright patch of sunshine in the old studio," she continued, smilingly caressing the blossoms, "and what a bright patch of sunshine in somebody's heart, my dear saint, what a warm, brilliant, altogether delightful patch to be sure."

## CHAPTER IV

On the next occasion that St. John made his appearance at the studio there was a visible constraint in his manner as there was also in Miss Erskine's. Jill had rehearsed a grateful little speech to deliver on his entry, but when their hands met there was silence; the speech, like many another rehearsed effect, had taken to itself wings, and all she could find to say after an awkward pause was,

"Good morning. The weather seems to have turned milder, doesn't it?"

And St John's remarkably original answer was,

"Really! Do you think so?"

And then they commenced work. Yet St. John knew that she had received his flowers,

and was pleased with them before even he caught sight of them, withered and dead now, in their basket on the window ledge; and she was equally aware that he understood all that she felt and yet had failed to express in words. The words came later when the sudden fit of embarrassment had worn off, and the lesson was nearing its termination, and there was no doubt as to the genuineness of her pleasure when she did thank him. She was sitting in his seat correcting his work, and he was standing over her with his hands on the back of the chair. When she said.

"It was more than kind of you, Mr. St. John, to send me those lovely flowers," he let his hands slip forward a little until they touched the sleeves of her gown. Jill, unconscious of the slight contact, continued gravely,

"I can't very well tell you how I enjoyed them because you could hardly understand how anyone loving such luxuries and yet unaccustomed to them could appreciate them.

It was like a peep of sunshine on a rainy day to me."

St. John drew himself up and stood with his hands clasped behind him. There was something about this girl, small, poorly clad, and friendless though she was, that commanded his respect, and he felt instinctively that his former lounging position had been an insult to her.

"I am glad," he answered simply. "It gives me pleasure to know that you enjoyed them."

When he left the Art school that morning, he carried away with him a pleasanter remembrance of it than he had ever had before, nor was he again to feel the same annoyance and resentment that he had experienced on every former occasion. Jill had let fall the mantle of reserve which at first it had pleased her to gather round her, and though she might later repent having done so she could never don it again with the same efficacy.

The next day Jill paid a visit to the dealer who bought her pictures, and, having managed

to dispose of a canvas, spent the rest of the morning shopping; eventually turning her steps in the direction of home laden with sundry small and not over tidy parcels. When passing Shoolbred's she encountered St. John in company with Miss Bolton. They met face to face, and though Jill, unhappily aware that she was looking shabby and insignificant, would have slipped by without recognising him, he saw her and raised his hat with a pleased smile. Jill returned a very slight inclination of the head and hurried on conscious only of Miss Bolton's cold stare, and her haughty, disapproving question before even the object of her enquiry had time to get out of earshot.

"Who are you bowing to, Jack? I wish that you would remember that you are walking with me."

Jill did not hear the answer; she had walked too fast, but her cheek burned, and she experienced the very unholy desire to upset Miss Bolton off her bike.

Having once heard of Miss Bolton it seemed fated that she should both hear and see more; the heiress appeared to cross her path at every turn, and for some reason which she could not altogether explain Jill entertained a very lively antipathy for her. Next Friday when St. John arrived at the Art School as usual her name again cropped up, and this time it was he who introduced it.

"I have found you a fresh pupil," he said, "if you care about bothering with another almost as great a novice as myself, what do you say, eh?"

"Oh!" cried Jill, "I shall be delighted. But did you explain all the disadvantages people patronising my studio have to battle with? Did you mention the stairs?"

St. John laughed.

"Yes," he answered. "But indeed you over-estimate the inconvenience of those stairs; they are nothing when you get accustomed to them. I am growing quite attached to them myself."

"I am glad of that," Jill answered smiling. "Do you know I was rather afraid at first that they would drive you away."

"*Afraid*!" he repeated incredulously. "I thought you were hoping that they would."

"Then how ungenerous of you to have kept on coming. But tell me about my new pupil,—masculine or feminine gender?—minor or adult?"

"It is my cousin Miss Bolton," he answered, "the lady who was unfortunate enough to run you down last week."

Jill's face fell; he could not help seeing it though he pretended not to. "The lady who had run her down!" Yes, she had indeed "run her down" in more senses than one. She turned away to hide her disappointment, and stood looking out of the window at the dirty roofs of the opposite houses. St. John watched her in silence. At length she spoke.

"I hope Miss Bolton doesn't think that that trifling accident which was as much my

fault as hers necessitates a step of such great condescension?" she said. "I cannot look at it in any other light for a lady in her position could study under the best masters how and where she pleased; her coming here, therefore, is a great condescension and I should be sorry to think that she inconvenienced herself under the mistaken idea that she owed me some slight reparation."

St. John worked perturbed. This small person had a way of making him feel decidedly uncomfortable at times.

"Miss Bolton's fancy to study art is a merely temporary whim," he answered. He did not add that the whim had been adopted at his instigation, and with a desire to please him rather than any enthusiasm on the subject, but went on gravely. "Her resolve to attend here is, I am conceited enough to believe, more on account of my doing so than any wish to obligate you. However as it has vexed you I am sorry that I mentioned the matter."

"Not at all," replied Jill coldly, flushing with quick annoyance; his speech for some reason or other had not pleased her. "Since Miss Bolton's desire is not simply to benefit me I shall be only too glad to get another pupil. I am very much obliged to you for recommending my establishment."

"Indeed!" he mentally ejaculated, "I shouldn't have thought so." Aloud he said,

"Don't mention it. I will tell Miss Bolton your decision; no doubt she will come with me next time."

The advent of this new pupil made a good deal of difference to Jill's simple arrangements. Hitherto two chairs had sufficed, now it was necessary to procure a third, but from where? Eventually she dragged to light an old packing case used for keeping odd papers in, and turning it on end, draped it with a piece of Turkey Twill which once a brilliant scarlet was now owing to having reached a respectable old age subdued to a more artistic shade. This erection would

provide sitting accommodation for herself at any rate, and St. John could use the chair with the hole in it. This difficulty solved, Jill set to work to alter the position of the curtain, which partitioned off the end of the room, so as to include the door; thus making a small room in which to receive her pupils instead of ushering them straightway into the studio; if necessary the curtain could be drawn back afterwards to make the art school larger. The rest of the preparations were postponed until Monday, and consisted of a thorough turning out of the room, and dusting and rearranging the models. And on Tuesday morning Jill sat on her box and surveyed the scene of her labour with much inward satisfaction. There was a nice fire burning in the grate and everything was in apple pie order, even to Jill, herself, who had twisted her hair up into a loose teapot-handle arrangement at the back of her head, and had dispensed with the studio apron as too childish for so important an occasion. She

wore also her best frock, and had gone to the expense of new collar and cuffs; and altogether felt thoroughly equal to receiving even the heiress to quarter of a million.

The heiress came late as was only to be expected. When St. John had turned up alone he had been generally sharp on time, but regularity was at an end now, Jill mentally supposed, as she arranged St. John's drawing-board and copy, and sharpened a pencil for him. It doesn't do to judge by appearances, to quote a trite truism, therefore Jill might really have been highly delighted at the prospect of an additional pupil, but she certainly did not look pleased.

It was ten o'clock before the new pupil arrived rather breathless, and clutching desperately at St. John's arm. The latter was looking worried, and seemed greatly relieved when once inside Jill's ante-chamber, an innovation that evidently met with his approval; for he glanced round with great satisfaction and having greeted Miss Erskine,

and presented his cousin, he suddenly disappeared round the curtain into the art school, leaving the two alone.

Miss Bolton was tall, pretty, and well dressed; she was also bent on being polite, and was almost effusive in her manner to Jill, but Miss Erskine was as cold as the North polar region, and equally distant.

"I am so glad to see you again?" gushed the heiress; "I have so wanted to apologise to you for my stupidity that morning—"

"*My* stupidity," corrected Jill.

"Oh, no! because there was heaps of room the other side of me, only I didn't notice that horrid cab. Cabs and busses are a nuisance in London, aren't they?"

"It would be a greater nuisance if London were without them," Jill answered.

"Do you think so? Oh! I don't—But of course, yes; I was forgetting the working classes."

"Yes," responded Miss Erskine in her

North Pole tone; "because you don't belong to them, I do."

But Miss Bolton was not in the least disconcerted.

"Ah, no, you're an artist," she replied, "a genius; that's heavenly, you know. Don't you recollect that an Emperor stooped for an artist's paint brush because 'Titian was worthy to be served by Caesar?'"

Jill's lip curled.

"I am not a Titian," she answered.

"Perhaps not," continued Miss Bolton in a I-know-better tone of voice. "Anyway Jack says that you are terribly clever. He considers your paintings superior to many of those on the line this year."

"Mr. St. John is very kind but I am afraid his criticism wouldn't avail me much. Will you tell me how far advanced you are. Of course you have studied drawing before?"

"Oh, yes! And painting also. My friends considered it a pity for me to drop it altogether with my other studies so I thought

that perhaps I would take it up again. Like music it is a very useful accomplishment 'pour passer le temps,' you know. I am considered fairly good at it."

"Ah!" responded Jill with uncomplimentary vagueness. "And what do you wish to go in for? Mr. St. John is studying the figure—"

Miss Bolton interrupted with a little scream.

"How horrid of him," she cried. "Not the nude, Miss Erskine, surely?"

Jill stared.

"Well, at present," she said, "he is drawing the human foot in outline, and it certainly hasn't a stocking on."

"But you don't teach—that sort of thing, do you?"

"It is usually taught in Art Schools," Jill answered frigidly. "So far as I am concerned I have only just commenced teaching. You do not wish to go in for the figure then?"

"Certainly not; flowers are my forte; I adore nature."

Apparently she did not consider that the human form reckoned in this category, and certainly her own, thanks to the aid of the costumière, had deviated somewhat from the natural laws of contour; nevertheless nature is at the root of our being and no matter how we attempt to disguise and ignore the fact she will not be denied. It was on the tip of Jill's tongue to remark that flowers alone did not constitute nature but she restrained herself, and endeavoured to check her increasing irritability.

"You are quite right not to go in for the figure," she said; "feeling as you do about it nature becomes coarse, and artificiality—or shall we say the conventional customs of circumstances?—preferable. Will you come into the studio?"

It just flashed through her mind to wonder what this young lady whose modesty was only to be equalled by Isobel's would say to

the models when she saw them, and it must be confessed that the thought of them caused her a certain malicious satisfaction, but when she held aside the curtain for Miss Bolton to enter she perceived to her unspeakable astonishment that all the models had been carefully draped with the dust covers in which they were kept encased when not in use, and which she had herself taken off that morning, and had folded and placed on the shelf. She glanced towards St. John in wrathful indignation, but St. John was busy measuring the length of the big toe in the copy and comparing it with his own drawing, which, taking into consideration the fact that he was not supposed to be making an enlargement, was not altogether satisfactory.

"May I enquire," asked Jill with relentless irony "the meaning of all these preparations? Was it fear of the models taking cold that induced you to cover them so carefully or a desire to study drapery, Mr. St. John?"

She paused expectantly, but St. John made no sign of having heard beyond an alarming increase of colour in the back of his neck, a mute appeal to her generosity, which she was not, however, in the mood to heed. Miss Bolton watched her in bewildered fascination, astonished at her displeasure and unable to understand the reason thereof. So entirely unprepared was she for what followed that it was probably a greater shock than if she had walked straight in amongst the models, it could not certainly have embarrassed her more. Jill, during the pause, had approached one of the figures, and now catching impatiently at the covering drew it off to the scandalized consternation of the new pupil, who, without waiting for more, burst into a very unexpected flood of tears, and fled precipitately from the room. Jill stared after her open-mouthed, and for a moment there was dead silence. Then St. John pushed back his chair and rose noisily to his feet.

"Con—excuse me," he corrected himself,

"but I think that I had better go and see after my cousin."

He caught up his hat with marked annoyance, and Jill stood gaping now at him still too astonished for words. She watched him go in silence, and then sat down on the twill covered box and drew a long breath—a sort of letting off steam in order to prevent an explosion.

"Well of all the inconceivable, incomparable, extraordinary, and revolting imbeciles that I have ever come across that girl is the worst," she ejaculated. "Thank heaven that my mind is not of that grovelling order which sees vulgarity in nature and coarseness where there should only be refinement. What agonies such people must endure at times; they can never go to a gallery that's certain, and I suppose they would blush at sight of a doll. Oh! my dear saint, why ever did you bring such a person here, I wonder?"

And then she sat and stared at his empty chair and saw in retrospection the expression

of vexed reproach in his eyes as he had risen to his feet, their mute enquiry.

"Could you not have spared me this? Was it necessary?"

And in equally mute response her heart made answer,

"Not necessary perhaps; but I'm not a bit sorry that it happened all the same."

## CHAPTER V

JILL did not anticipate the return of either of her pupils that morning—did not, indeed, expect Miss Bolton to return at all; in both of which surmises she proved correct. St. John had been obliged to hail a four-wheeler and drive with his cousin home, and a most unpleasant drive she made it; it was as much as he could do to sit quiet under her shower of tearful reproaches. He ought to have known better than to have taken her to such a low place. She might have guessed after having seen her what sort of creature the girl was. It would have been much better to have acted as she wished to in the first place —given some suitable donation or commissioned her for a painting; that would have been quite sufficient; it wasn't her

fault that the stupid girl got in front of her wheel, etc : etc :

St. John said,

"Shut up, Evie ; don't talk rot."

But when you tell some people to shut up it has a contrary effect and serves as an incentive to talk more, it was so with Miss Bolton. She was not violent because it was not her nature to be demonstrative, nor was she in the slightest degree vulgar ; but her command over the English language could not fail to excite the astonishment of her listener ; to quote St. John's euphonism, 'it made him sick.'

"I daresay," retorted Miss Bolton disagreeably ; "my remarks generally have a nauseating effect upon you, I notice ; yet that disgraceful girl without any sense of decency——"

"*In*decency, you mean," he interrupted.

"You are very horrid," sobbed his cousin, subsiding into tears again, and St. John devoutly wished that he had held his peace.

The rest of the journey was very watery, and at its termination he felt too demoralized to do anything except go for a stroll; the house with Miss Bolton in it was too small for him. Miss Bolton was Mr. St. John senior's ward; she was a kind of fifth cousin twice removed, which was the nearest kinship that she could claim on earth—that is to say with anyone worth claiming kinship with. There were cousins who kept a haberdashery, and spoke of the 'heiress' with a big 'h' but Evie Bolton didn't know them; though according to the genealogical tree they were only once removed, but that remove had been so distant that it made all the difference in the world. Mr. St. John, senior, both admired and loved his ward, Mr. St. John, junior, was expected to follow the paternal example, and Miss Bolton, herself, was quite willing to present her big, good-looking cousin with her hand, and her fortune, and as much of her heart as she could conveniently spare. It would be difficult to ascertain

whether St. John appreciated her generosity as it deserved. He had appeared thoroughly acquiescent up to the present when a possible engagement had been mooted by his father, but had so far refrained from putting his luck to the test. But in Mr. St. John, sen's, eyes the affair was a settled fact, and had anyone suggested the probability of its coming to nothing he would have scouted the idea.

The following Friday when St. John entered the Art School he found a very subdued little figure waiting for him—the old style of Jill with her hair tied with ribbon, and the big pinafore over her shabby frock. But not altogether the old style either; there was no attempt at dignity here, no self-sufficiency of manner but that she was so thoroughly composed he would have thought her nervous. She shook hands with a slightly deprecating smile, and remarked interrogatively,

"Miss Bolton has not come? I am sorry."

"No," he answered with an assumption at

indifference which he was far from feeling. "I told you art was a temporary whim with her, and I fancy the stairs rather appalled her; she is not very strong."

His desire to spare her embarrassment was altogether too palpable. Jill turned away to hide a smile, or a blush, or something feminine which she did not wish him to perceive. He watched her in some amusement and waited for her to break the silence. He would have liked to have helped her out, but could think of nothing to say.

"I behaved foolishly last Tuesday;" she re-remarked at length, speaking with her back impolitely turned towards him, and a mixture of shame and triumph on the face which he could not see. "I lost my temper which was ill bred; and," turning round and laughingly openly, "I'm afraid that I'm not so sorry as I ought to be. Don't," putting up her hand as he essayed to speak, "go on making excuses —your very apologies but condemn me further. It was most ungracious on my part

after Miss Bolton's condescension in coming; yet how was I to know that she was so supersensitive?"

"I ought to have warned you," he answered. "But never mind now; there is very little harm done, only I am afraid that you have lost a pupil."

"And isn't that highly deplorable," cried Jill. "considering how few I have?"

But St. John was not to be drawn into any expression of sympathy; personally he felt no inconvenience, and he shrewdly suspected that Miss Erskine was not particularly distressed herself. He sat down and work commenced as usual.

St. John was getting on more quickly than his teacher had imagined that he would. He was not likely to ever make an artist but still he progressed very fairly in amateur fashion. His eye unfortunately was not true; he could never see when a thing was out of drawing, but he was always ready to listen to advice, and correct his work under supervision. His

greatest fault was a desire to get on too quickly; and Jill had to assert her authority on more than one occasion to restrain him, and keep his ambition in check.

One day, several weeks after the Bolton episode, he suggested that it was time he commenced painting; he was tired of black and white. He was then drawing from the bust of Clytie, and had only just begun working from the cast. Jill was not in a good temper that morning—things had not been prospering with her lately—and so St. John's ill-timed suggestion met with scant consideration.

"You want to run before you can walk," she returned with ill-humoured sarcasm. "Some people are like that. I knew of a girl once who was learning riding and insisted on cantering the second time she went out. The result was not altogether satisfactory; for it left her sitting in the middle of the road. Last week I yielded to your insane desire to attempt Clytie; the attempt is a failure; and so you want to begin painting."

"Well," he answered not exactly pleased by her manner of refusing his petition. "I certainly should like to vary the monotony. I don't see why I shouldn't paint one day a week and draw on the other."

"That's not my system," replied Jill, and the curt finality of tone and manner irritated him exceedingly. He felt like saying 'Damn your system,' and only refrained by biting fiercely at his moustache, and jerking back his drawing-board with such vehemence that, coming into violent contact with the cast from which he had been working, and which stood on a box in the centre of the table, it upset the whole erection, and with a terrible crash Jill's favourite model was shivered into fragments. Jill, herself, flew into such a rage as baffles description, and, alas to have to record it! springing forward boxed St. John's ears. It was by no means a lady-like thing to do; but it seemed to occasion her some slight relief. She was positively quivering with passion, and stood glaring at the offender

as though he had been guilty of a crime. St. John flushed crimson, and as if fearful of further assault dodged behind the model of the Venus de Medici. He could hardly be reproached with taking refuge behind a woman's petticoats; anyone knowing the figure could vouch for the impracticability of that; but he felt decidedly safer screened by the white limbs which had so scandalized his cousin, and betrayed no disposition to emerge again in a hurry; he was very big and Jill was very little but he most certainly felt afraid of her just then.

"How clumsy of you!" she cried. "I wouldn't have had it happen for the world—I believe you did it on purpose."

"I did not," he protested indignantly. "How can you say such a thing? I am as sorry as you can be that it happened."

He was not though, and he knew it. He considered her vexation altogether disproportionate, and absurd to a degree verging on affectation. Had the damage been irrepar-

able he could have understood her loss of self-control; but it was only a plaster cast which she must assuredly know that he would replace. Being a man he did not take sentiment into consideration at all, but merely thought her ill-tempered and ungovernable.

"How dare you equal your sorrow to mine?" Jill demanded fiercely. "You can't know how I feel. I don't believe you care."

Her lip trembled and she turned quickly away. Never had she looked so forlorn, so little, so shabby, he thought, as at that moment, and perhaps never in his life before had he felt so uncomfortable—such a brute. Vacating his position of safety he approached until he was close behind her where she stood with her back to the debris, and he saw that her hands were picking nervously at the paint-soiled apron.

"Don't," he said, and his voice sounded strangely unlike his usual tones. "You make me feel such a beast. You know that I care

—you must know it. I would rather anything had happened than have vexed you like this."

"It doesn't matter," answered Jill a little unsteadily, and then one of the two big tears which had been welling slowly in her eyes fell with a splash upon the floor, and he started as though she had struck him a second time.

"Don't," he entreated again. And then without waiting for more he took his hat and slipped quietly out of the studio. Jill scarcely noticed his departure, did not even speculate as to his object in thus unceremoniously leaving, nor wonder whether he was likely to return or not. She was rather relieved at finding herself alone, and able to give vent to the emotion she could no longer repress. Sitting down at the table in the seat which St. John had so suddenly vacated she laid her head upon his drawing-board and wept all over the paper. The outburst, which was purely neurotic,—such outbursts usually are—

had been gathering for days past, and had culminated with the fall of Clytie—the breaking of the bust which her father had so loved. Alas! for the sweet, sad, absurd associations which cling about the things that the dead have touched.

St. John was not away very long; he had been to a shop that he knew of quite handy, and had driven there and back thanks to the stupid cabs that Miss Bolton found so inconvenient. He had bought another bust of Clytie, an altogether superior article in Parian marble which he carried back to the studio in triumph quite expecting to see Jill's grief vanish at sight of it, and tears give place to smiles. He found her still seated at the table; she was not crying any longer; but the traces of recent emotion were sufficiently apparent for him to detect at a glance. The sight sobered him instantly, and he approached with less confidence in the efficiency of his purchase than had possessed him when out of her presence.

"It's all right," he exclaimed, speaking as cheerfully as he could, and placing the new Clytie on the table among the ruins of her predecessor, "I managed to get another. I hope you'll like it as well as the one I broke. It was confoundedly clumsy of me. But you aren't angry with me still?"

"No," answered Jill, raising her head to view the Clytie as he drew off the paper wrapping for her to see. "Oh!" she cried, "it is far too good; mine was only plaster."

"Was it?" he said slowly. "And yet, I fancy, you preferred it infinitely to this one."

Jill's lips quivered ominously again, and half unconsciously as it were she fingered one of the broken pieces in lingering regret.

"It had associations," she said simply.

He stooped forward so that he could see her face, and his hand sought hers where it rested upon the table, and with a kindly pressure imprisoned it while he spoke.

"Can't you form associations round this one too?" he asked.

For a moment there was silence. Then she looked back at him and smiled faintly.

"I have commenced doing so already," she answered, and, quietly withdrawing her hand, rose and stood back a little the better to admire his purchase.

"It was dreadfully extravagant of you to buy a thing like that just for an art school model," she exclaimed. "It ought to be in some drawing-room instead of here."

"It looks very well where it is," he answered coolly. "But I think I'll give over trying to draw it for a time; I can't catch that sadly contemplative, sweetly scornful expression at all; I make a sneer of it which is diabolical. Don't insist, please; because it makes me nervous just to look at her."

That was the beginning of things—at any rate the perceptible commencement; though it might have begun with the flowers as Isobel had insinuated. Never a word did St. John utter that Jill could possibly have turned or twisted into a betrayal of the growing re-



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gard which she felt in her heart he entertained for her, and never a sign did Jill make that she understood, or in any way reciprocated his unspoken liking. She knew that he loved her by instinct, and the knowledge made her glad, so that her life was no longer lonely, nor the occasional privations, the incessant work, the petty, carking, almost daily worries so hard to bear. Life was one long pleasant day-dream; though sometimes Miss Bolton "biked" through the dreaming, and then it became a night-mare, and Jill was consumed with a fierce burning jealousy that lasted until a new-born, audacious, delicious conceit—her woman's intuition—assured her that poor and insignificant though she was St. John was far more fond of her than he would ever be of his pretty, elegant, and wealthy cousin.

## CHAPTER VI

St. John had attended Miss Erskine's studio for two quarters, and was now into the third. He was still her sole pupil; though she had had another student, a long-legged girl of fifteen who had attended for three weeks and then been taken away in a hurry because her mother had discovered that Miss Erskine was very young, and had, besides her daughter, only one other pupil—*a man*—and no chaperone. She wrote Miss Erskine very plainly on the subject of the impropriety of her conduct, and gave her a good deal of advice, but omitted to enclose the fee. Jill showed the letter to St. John as the best way of explaining his fellow-student's absence, and St. John laughed over it immoderately; he

was so glad that the long-legged girl was gone.

"It's rather rough on you though," he remarked as he returned the missive which Jill put into her pocket to keep for a curiosity. "If you get another pupil of that description you'll have to get rid of me, that's certain. Poor little snub-nosed Flossie! I hope we didn't demoralize her altogether. How I do detest the respectable British matron, don't you?"

"No," answered Jill. "I detest the vulgar, narrow-minded order though, like the writer of this letter. That poor child! I used to think her a giggling little idiot. She did giggle, and she wasn't very wise; but she is greatly to be commiserated all the same."

Jill had no fresh pupils after that, only St. John trudged manfully up the steep, narrow stairs with unfailing regularity, and once, when she was ill and obliged to stay in bed with a bad cold on her chest, he sent her fruit and flowers, but carefully refrained from

going near the studio himself until he received a little note from her thanking him and saying that she was well enough to resume work.

Independent of the fee he paid for tuition, and the pleasure she derived from his society Jill enjoyed many advantages through his being at the studio which she could not herself have afforded. For one thing when he started painting he insisted upon employing a model; he wanted to paint from life; and Jill had to pose the model and paint from him or her—as the case might be—at the same time. She made good use of her opportunities, and many of the canvasses sold, but she had to dispose of them far below their market value at a merely nominal profit which just paid her and that was all. St. John offered her a hundred and fifty pounds for one picture—a female figure against a background of sea and sky, the whole veiled in a kind of white mist—a vapoury shroud which softened yet did not conceal. Jill had chris-

tened this picture "The Pride of the Morning," and for some reason, perhaps because St. John so greatly admired it, she felt loth to let it go for the ridiculous price which she had accepted for the other canvasses; yet when St. John wished to purchase it she refused. She would not sell it to him though she offered it as a gift, but he would not take it, and so "The Pride of the Morning" was stood in a corner of the studio facing the wall just as though it was in disgrace.

Just about this time Jill had a regular run of ill luck. In the first instance the man who always bought her canvasses became bankrupt and was sold up, and Jill, who didn't know anything about sending in claims, and had no one to advise her; for she never consulted St. John on purely personal matters for fear of his finding out how very poor she really was, lost the price of three canvasses which he had taken of her and never paid for, besides having nowhere now to dispose of her work. He had paid her poorly but it

had been a certain market, and although she tramped London over, as it seemed to her weary feet, she could find no one to give her an order, or even a promise of work in the future; she had plenty of time for dreaming now. Besides this, the rent of her rooms was due again, and it was absolutely expedient that she should have new boots. And then came the climax—at least it seemed the climax to Jill's overwrought and tired brain, but it was not so; as a matter of fact that fell later when she had not conceived it possible that greater trouble could fall to human lot. She became ill again—off her head, as Isobel informed St. John when she received him one Tuesday with the intimation that he could not go up as usual. The heat of summer, together with the continual atmosphere of white lead and turpentine had been too much for Jill, and she had collapsed, and, becoming rambling and incoherent in her talk the landlady had taken things into her own hands and sent for the doctor, when it was

only rest and a little nursing and relief from mental worry that the invalid stood in need of, and not physic, a doctor's bill, and impossible advice. The doctor came. She was thoroughly run down, he said; and he ordered her things that she could not buy, and change of air which she could not afford either, though she told him that she would see about it for fear he should think that she was hoping he would not charge her for attendance, which was very foolish and proud, just as foolish as her refusal to sell St. John the picture.

When she was well enough to get out again she took a holiday and spent it at Hampden Court, going by steam-boat and returning in the evening by train after a long, solitary, but on the whole fairly enjoyable day. That was all the change of air she took, and greatly it benefitted her, far more than anyone would imagine so short a time could do. On her way home when she was crossing the road where Bedford Square merges into Gower Street a private hansom

passed her with St. John and his cousin in it both in evening dress. Jill had fancied that Miss Bolton was out of town, and the sight of her quite upset all the pleasure she had derived from her jaunt.

They did not see her, for it was dark in the road, but a street lamp shining full in their faces as they drove past revealed them plainly to her, and she noticed that St. John was looking both bored and worried, a fact which compensated somewhat for the shock of disappointment she had experienced on seeing the heiress.

When she reached home there was a package of books addressed to her on the hall table, and a note in the bold, familiar handwriting she had learnt to know so well. She carried them up to her room and sat on the edge of her bed while she read the latter without waiting to take off her hat, or put in water the knot of wild flowers, faded now, which she had gathered and thrust into her belt.

"Dear Miss Erskine," it ran,

"I am sending you some literature on the chance of your being well enough now to do a little reading, and time, I know, hangs heavy when one is convalescent. Don't worry about the lessons; I am enjoying the holiday; but when may I be allowed to call and see you? I have something to say to you which will not keep.

Yours very truly,

J. St. John."

Jill's heart gave a little jump as her eye took in the last sentence, and she made a shy guess at what the 'something' might be, a guess which sent the blood to her face in a warm rich glow, and set her pulses tingling in ecstatic enjoyment. She was curious to hear that something, so curious that she could hardly wait, and yet she was determined not to let St. John suspect how curious she really was. Going into the studio she sat down at the table and wrote her reply, a carefully worded little note thanking him for the books, and appointing Friday morning at the usual hour for him to visit her; stating that she was quite well and anxious to begin work.

It was Wednesday so that there would be the whole of Thursday to get through, but Jill felt that she could manage that now that the letter was written, and tired though she was she went out again and posted it.

The next morning by the same post that St. John got his letter, Jill received her doctor's account which was considerably heavier than she had expected. It is an expensive luxury being ill. She sighed as she looked at the bill, and wondered where the money was coming from. She had not got it just then that was certain; the settlement must be deferred for a while. How hard it was to want to pay and not be able to do so! Later in the morning as she sat huddled up near the window poring over one of the books St. John had sent—for she could not work with the thought of the morrow before her; her sense of the fitness of things had bidden her take a last holiday and give herself up thoroughly to the enjoyment of the present—her attention was diverted from the novel by

the sound of a footstep on the stairs, a heavy, uncertain, unmistakably masculine step which reminded her with a strange thrill of St. John's first visit when he had stumbled up those stairs in the darkness eight months ago. She waited where she was until the visitor knocked, a loud, imperative, double knock on the door with his stick, then she rose, laid aside her book, and slowly crossed the room. Outside on the narrow landing stood an elderly man, tall and gaunt, with shoulders slightly bent, and iron grey hair and beard. He eyed Jill uncertainly, very much as St. John had done, and, also like St. John, concluded that she must be a pupil; she looked so very childish, much more like a child, indeed, than had the lanky, short-frocked, girl-student who had studied there so brief a time.

"I wish to speak with Miss Erskine," he said. And Jill, in vague foreboding, and with a dull repetition of her information on that former occasion, answered quietly,

"I am Miss Erskine."

"Good God!" exclaimed her visitor, and without waiting for an invitation he strode past her into the studio. Jill followed him wondering, and standing opposite to him, watched him closely, waiting for more.

"My name is St. John," he said—the bomb had fallen. "My son—h'm!—studies art here."

He looked round superciliously as though he wondered how anyone could study anything in so mean a place; no doubt he considered that his son's explanation had been merely a plausible excuse.

"Yes," Jill answered, and that was all.

He felt irritated with her that she was so quiet, so reserved, and so thoroughly self-possessed. He had expected something different; his ward had spoken of her as a horrid, designing, low-minded creature, his son had told him plainly only the night before that she was the one woman he loved, or ever could love; he had put the two descriptions together, and had pictured something handsome

and sophisticated, bold perhaps, and necessarily charming, but nothing like what he found; not an ill-dressed, white-faced, ordinary-looking child-woman, whose great grey eyes watched him with such wistful, apprehensive, piteous anxiety that he turned away from their scrutiny with ill-concealed vexation.

"I have come on an unpleasant errand," he went on, "and naturally feel rather upset. But these unpleasant things must happen so long as men are imprudent and women over anxious. Have you no one belonging to you?—no one to advise you?"

"Thank you," Jill answered drawing herself up proudly, "I do not want advice."

"So most young people think," he said irascibly; "but they do well to accept it all the same. My son has been studying under you for some time, I believe?"

"Yes," replied Jill, "since last January."

"And have you any more pupils?"

"Not now; I had one other for a short

time. But the locality is against my forming an extensive connection."

"And you and my son work here alone two mornings a week?" he continued staring hard at her under his bushy brows, "*Entirely* alone?"

"Yes," she answered, and his tone brought the blood to her pale cheeks in a great wave of colour; but she looked him steadily in the face notwithstanding. It did not seem to occur to her to resent this cross examination; she just listened to his queries and answered them as though he had a right to catechise her, and she must of necessity reply.

"Do you consider that altogether discreet, Miss Erskine?" he enquired.

Jill flushed painfully again, and her breath came more quickly. It is so easy to wound another's feelings that sometimes the inflicter of so much pain hardly realises the anguish that he causes.

"Mr. St. John," the girl said quickly, speaking as though she were anxious to say

what she wished to, before her suddenly acquired courage deserted her again, "I don't quite understand what it is you want with me, and I can hardly believe that you have come here with no other intention than that of insulting me. Your last question was an insult. Do you think that I am in a position to be discreet entirely dependent as I am on my own exertions? Art with the many does not pay well. But I can assure you had your son been other than he is—a gentleman—I should not, as you so graphically put it, have worked here with him two mornings a week entirely alone."

Mr. St. John was rather taken aback; she was evidently not such a child as she looked.

"Excuse me," he said, "but you mistake me altogether. I know my son thoroughly, and though I have never had the privilege of meeting you before to-day, yet once seeing is quite sufficient to disabuse my mind of any prejudice I may have entertained towards you.

In speaking of indiscretion I was thinking entirely of outside criticism."

Jill smiled faintly, contemptuously, incredulously. She had him at a disadvantage, and the knowledge gave her a gratifying sense of superiority.

"I am too insignificant a unit in this little world to excite criticism, captious or the reverse," she answered. "I thought, myself, at first that it wouldn't do, but have since been humbled into learning that my actions pass unheeded by the outside world. A great many actions of bigger people than myself pass unnoticed if they were only big-minded enough to realize it. Humanity does not spend its time solely in watching the doings of its neighbour; that is left for the little minds who have nothing more important to occupy themselves with. But you didn't come here to warn me of my indiscretion. Would you mind telling me what the "unpleasant errand' is?"

"No," he answered bluntly coming to the

point. "I was merely anxious not to be too abrupt. I want to induce my son to give up coming here, and I can't persuade him. Will you?"

He did not look at her, but drawing a cheque-book from his pocket with unnecessary display placed it upon the table. Jill watched him comprehensively, and the blood seemed to freeze in her veins as she did so.

"Why," she asked, and could have bitten out her tongue because the word choked in her throat, "why should he give up coming?"

"This is absurd," exclaimed Mr. St. John. "Let us give over fencing and understand one another. My son is infatuated—he generally is, by the way, it is a failing of his," —Jill felt this to be untrue even while he said it, but she made no sign. You, of course, are quite aware of his infatuation? But, Miss Erskine, he is a beggar; he has nothing in the world save what I allow him."

"How degrading!" cried Jill. "I should have credited him with possessing more man-

hood than that. Everyone should be independent who can be."

He smiled and tapped the cheque-book with his fingers. He fancied that she would be sensible.

"It would not be wise to marry a pauper, would it?" he queried. "For a man who marries against his relative's wishes when he looks to them for every penny, would be a pauper, without doubt."

"No," Jill answered with unnatural quietness, "it would not be wise. I don't think anyone would contradict that."

"You would not yourself, for instance?"

"Most certainly I should not."

"Now we begin to understand one another," he resumed almost cheerfully. He had greatly feared a scene; but she was so absolutely unemotional that he felt relieved.

"Personally, you will understand I should have no objection to you as a daughter-in-law at all, only I have made other arrangements for my son, arrangements so highly advan-

tageous that it would be the height of folly to reject them as he proposes doing. He must marry his cousin, the young lady whose acquaintance, I learn, you have already made—"

"What! The young lady with a soul above nature?" interrupted Jill, thoroughly astonished, and for the first time off her guard. "Oh, he'll never marry her."

"Indeed he will; there is nothing else for him to do. You forget that I can cut him off without a shilling, and will do so if he does not conform to my wishes."

"Yes," Jill acquiesced as though she were discussing something entirely disconnected with herself, "Of course, I had forgotten that."

"The long and the short of the matter is this, Miss Erskine, if you insist upon encouraging my son in his mad infatuation you ruin his prospects and do yourself no good; for I believe that you agreed that you would not marry a pauper?"

"No," she answered, staring stonily out of

the window with a gaze which saw nothing. "I would not marry a pauper; I don't think it would be wise, and I don't think it would be right to do so."

"A very sensible decision," returned Mr. St. John, sen., approvingly. "You have taken a great weight off my mind, my dear young lady; and I am greatly indebted to you. How greatly you alone are in a position to say," and he tapped the cheque-book again with reassuring delicacy, but Jill did not notice the action and for once failed to follow the drift of his speech. A dull, heavy, aching despair had fallen upon her which she could not shake off. She seemed hardly to be listening to him now and only imperfectly comprehended his meaning.

"I am to understand then," Mr. St. John resumed, straightening himself, and looking about him with an urbane benevolence that was most irritating, "that you will work in conjunction with us? Disillusion him a little, and—"

"Oh, stop!" cried Jill, with the first real display of feeling that she had shown throughout the interview. "I cannot bear it. Do you think that because I have adopted art as a profession that I have turned into a lay figure and have no heart at all? You have robbed existence of its only pleasure so far as I am concerned. Can you not spare me the rest? I won't impoverish him by marrying him but I am glad that he loves me, and I won't try to lessen his love—I can't do that."

He regarded her with angry impatience, frowning heavily the while. It was a try on—a diplomatic ruse, he considered; he had wondered rather at her former impassiveness; but apparently she was not very quick-witted and had been unprepared.

"My dear Miss Erskine," he exclaimed, endeavouring to adapt himself to the new mood with but little success however, "you are too sensible altogether to indulge in heroics. I don't wish to appear harsh, and I

am quite certain that you have your feelings like anyone else, but there are Miss Bolton's feelings also to be taken into consideration, and, though I greatly regret having myself to announce his dishonourable behaviour, she has been engaged to my son for some months past."

Jill stared at him in dumb, unquestioning anguish. Engaged! Perhaps that had been the 'something' he wished to communicate to her. He had never given her any reason to suppose otherwise; it had only been her vanity that had led her to imagine what she had.

"He has not behaved dishonourably," she answered with difficulty; "he has never made love to me. It was you who told me that he cared; I did not know."

He looked surprised.

"I am glad to learn that that is so," he said. "I had feared things had gone further. And now, my dear young lady, I must apologise for the intrusion, and will finish up

this very unpleasant business as speedily as possible."

He opened the cheque-book and took up a pen to write with.

"You will allow me," he began; but Jill took the pen quickly and replaced it in the stand. She was white to the very lips, and trembled all over like a person with the ague.

"Go," she said hoarsely, "before I say what I might regret all my life. My God! what have I done or said that you should take me for a thing like that? Go, please; oh! go away at once."

## CHAPTER VII

THE climax had come. It had rushed upon her with an unexpectedness that was overwhelming and had left her too stunned to even think connectedly. Only the night before she had been so full of glad expectation, and now everything seemed at an end and all the gladness vanished. She walked unsteadily back to her old seat by the window, and fingered absently the book St. John had sent. It was a new volume, and had been a gift; for he had written her name on the fly leaf. The fact had given her pleasure last night, now she wondered why he had done it, and laid the book down again wearily, all her former interest gone. There were other evidences of his gifts about the room in the shape of baskets once contain-

ing fruit and flowers. The fruit had been all eaten, and the flowers were dead; a bunch of them, fading fast, drooped in a vase upon the table; the rest, dried and discoloured, with all their beauty perished, were hidden away in Jill's little bedroom where only she could see them, and recall the pleasure they had given; and from her exalted position on on the bracket which she occupied alone, Clytie looked down white, and pure, and pensive, seeming to understand. Oh! it was hard, and cruel, and bitter,—all the more bitter, that the mistake had been her own. She drew from the bosom of her frock St. John's brief note, the note that had made her so happy, and read it again by the light of her new understanding, 'Don't worry about the lessons; I am enjoying the holiday.' Perhaps he had meant it literally and not, as she had imagined, penned the clause solely with a thoughtful desire to save her anxiety. How vain she had been!—how mad! 'I have something to say to you which will not

keep.' So vague a sentence, and yet she had fancied that she had guessed his meaning rightly. He might have meant a hundred things, and what more probable than the announcement of his engagement?

Jill crouched by the window for the rest of the morning hugging this new trouble which had dwarfed all the others into insignificance. At first she was too dazed to feel anything much, then gradually the anguish of mind grew keener until it seemed unbearable, and finally exhausted itself by its own violence. After that came a lull, and then followed resentment, fierce, active, healthy resentment that left absolutely no room for any other emotion; resentment against her recent visitor, angry, contemptuous, indignant; resentment against Miss Bolton of the fiercely jealous order; but keenest of all resentment against St. John, the cold, inflexible, heartsore resentment of wounded love. He ought to have told her of his engagement; if not actually dishonourable

it was mean of him to have suppressed the fact when he must have seen that he was becoming necessary to her, when he knew, too, that she was more than, under the circumstances, she should have been to him; for that he did care for her she did not doubt —infatuation his father had called it, and it might be that he was right. At any rate St. John should have left the Art School before it had grown too late. This feeling of anger acted as a tonic to Jill; it braced her nerves and put her on her mettle, so that she determined to face her trouble and conquer it, and if possible show St. John what a poor opinion she had of him. But then came the remembrance of her small debts and her poverty. It had been a bad thing for her this acquaintance with St. John; she had not relied sufficiently on herself. When he was gone the fee would cease, and she had not sold any work for weeks. The last canvas that she had been engaged upon before her illness, painting from a model St. John had

employed, stood against the wall unfinished and there were others ready for sale but nowhere to dispose of them. In the afternoon she went out—there was no time for holidays now—in search of a market, and returned in the evening weary, footsore, miserable, having had no luck at all with her canvasses, but—oh! the degradation to Jill's artist-soul—having been obliged to accept as the only thing going an order for half-a-dozen night-dress sachets—'pyjama bags' as the oily, leering, facetious individual who had given her the commission called them.

"There was a run on 'em," he had added, "the swells like painted satin things to keep their night-gear in."

Jill had agreed to do the work, but she looked far from happy over it, and very nearly cried as she turned to leave the shop. The facetious individual had chucked her under the chin, and told her to 'buck up,' and he would look round and see if there wasn't something else he could find her to 'daub.'

Then he winked at her, and Jill had broken away in haste fearing that these overtures would lead to an embrace. And so she reached home, and that night went early to bed, and Thursday ended unhappily even as it had begun.

The next morning when she rose, the feeling of anger was still paramount. She had suffered so keenly yesterday that she did not think it possible that she could feel any greater pain, and she found it difficult to realize yet all that this sudden breaking with St. John must mean. She steeled herself to meet her old pupil with composure though she had not yet determined upon what she should say or do. At first she had thought of writing and forbidding him ever to come to the Art School again, but had subsequently rejected this plan as impracticable; what reason had she to offer? She could not say on account of your engagement, such an excuse would have placed her in a false position, and given St. John a right to put

what construction he chose upon her motive. The only thing that remained for her was to receive him, and by saying as little as possible convince him how indifferent she was, and how very determined at the same time. And at nine thirty sharp he arrived, clattering up the steep stairs like a noisy schoolboy and marching through the open door straight into the studio where Jill stood white and nervous, but outwardly calm, waiting to receive him. There was a pleased, eager, confident air about him in striking contrast to the chilling quiet of her manner, and he grasped her hand before she could prevent him with a very hearty grip of genuine sincerity.

"This is good to see you about again," he began. Then he stopped short struck by something in her face, and exclaimed anxiously. "Nothing the matter I hope, Miss Erskine?"

Jill was standing with her back to the light so that she had the advantage of him that way; but St. John's sight was good and

he detected at once the suppressed agitation of her manner; though she, herself, was unaware of it there was a whole life's tragedy in the depths of her grey eyes.

"No," she answered; "nothing beyond a trifling annoyance that I have been subjected to lately, and which I have determined to put an end to for good and all. It is absurd of course and really not worth discussing, but these petty worries are even more trying than big ones."

"If it is not worth discussion," he said, "we'll let it slide for to-day at any rate. I have got so much to say that is worth discussing, that I want to say it at once. I give you fair warning that I haven't come to work."

As a matter of fact there was no work put ready for him; but he had not time to notice that. He was so boyish and impulsive, so gay and self-complacent that her anger gathered strength from his sheer light-heartedness.

"Come and sit beside me on the stool by the window, Jill," he said, "and then we can talk at our ease."

It was the first time that he had addressed her by her Christian name, and he glanced at her half smiling, half diffident, to see how she would take it.

"No," she answered coldly, "what I have to say can very well be said where I am, and it will be as well to get through with it at once. You will think it rather sudden no doubt after my note of Wednesday, but, as I told you, I have been subjected to a great deal of annoyance lately and what I experienced yesterday has decided me to put an end to the existing state of affairs. I regret having to spring this upon you so abruptly, and in the middle of a quarter too, but I wish you to understand that I cannot teach you any longer, I wish you to leave this Art School."

St. John looked mystified and incredulous, he was astounded at her request, at the cold

precision of her voice, and the apathy of her expression. He felt annoyed with her and not a little hurt.

"May I enquire why you dismiss me thus suddenly?" he asked schooling himself to keep his vexation in check. "I should like to know what has induced you to act so precipitately."

"No, you may not," Jill answered crossly; "I only took you on trial, remember."

"For a quarter yes, but then the probation was over, and it is hardly etiquette to dismiss a pupil in the middle of a term without vouchsafing any reason."

"I consider it quite sufficient that I do dismiss you," Miss Erskine responded. "We will not discuss the matter further, if you please."

"Oh! yes, we will," he answered, his temper like her own beginning to get the upper hand. "In fact I refuse to leave without an alleged complaint before my term is expired; you are bound to give a proper notice."

"Not if I expel you," Jill retorted.

"Expel me!" he scoffed. "What would you expel me for? You couldn't do that without a reason."

"But I have a reason."

"A reason!" he repeated aghast, "a reason sufficient to expel me? What reason pray?"

"Making love to me."

Silence followed—a depressing silence during which neither of them moved. She had spoken in the heat of the moment, the next she could have bitten out her tongue for her indiscretion. St. John stared at her fully a minute. Then he smiled rudely.

"Making love to you!" he repeated. "Absurd! I have never spoken a word of love to you in my life."

It was true; he had not, and Jill's cup of humiliation was full. What had induced her to make such an egregious error?

"You'll be running me in for breach of promise, I suppose?" he continued ruthlessly.

"Don't you think that you're a little—a little—well, conceited to be so premature?"

Jill turned upon him wrathfully.

"How dare you speak to me like that?" she cried. "It is only what people think. For myself it wouldn't have mattered whether you had made love to me or not; I should soon have settled that."

He changed from angry crimson to dead white, and gazed at her in hurt displeasure.

"You mean that?" he asked.

"Certainly," she answered with vindictive and unnecessary emphasis, "I am not in the habit of prevaricating."

"Very well," he said in a tone of forced calm which contrasted ill with the pained expression of his face, "I believe you. And under the circumstances am quite of your opinion that further acquaintance had better cease. It was a mistake my coming at all both for you and for me. Good-morning, Miss Erskine, and good-bye."

He paused, thinking that perhaps her

mood had been prompted by caprice, and that she might relent yet and call him back; but she made no movement at all beyond a bend of the head, and her voice was no kinder when she wished him farewell. Then he went, striding down the stairs and out into the street, resentful, angry, heartsore, little guessing how very much greater was the unhappiness he had left behind him where Jill, alone now in every sense of the word, stood battling with her grief and her emotion, and trying to face the difficulties which seemed crowding upon her on every side. She got out her satin work when he had gone and started upon the sachets with eager haste, glad of the miserable order now; for it kept her employed, and diverted the train of her thoughts. And all that day she sat working, working feverishly, dining, when the light failed so that she could see to paint no longer, off a crust of bread, the best her larder had to offer—indeed the only thing.

The next morning by the early post she re-

ceived a letter from St. John. Her hand trembled so violently as she took it up that she could hardly unfasten the envelope, but, finally tearing it open she withdrew the contents, a sheet of notepaper with St. John's compliments inscribed thereon, and enclosed within a cheque for the fee paid in full up to the end of the present quarter. The cheque fell to the ground unheeded but the sheet of paper Jill spread out on the table before her and then sat staring at it as though she could not take it in. It was the first brief missive of the sort that she had received; its very brevity chilled her. "With Mr. St. John's compliments." So he had accepted his dismissal? It was better so, of course; but it was very hard to bear all the same.

## CHAPTER VIII

It was the Tuesday following that miserable and never to be forgotten Friday. Jill had been out in the morning to take back two of the sachets which she had finished, but had brought them back to make some alterations that the oily individual had pointed out to her in a playfully amorous fashion; a circumstance that had put her into as bad a temper as her grief stricken soul would allow. She sat on the red stool before her easel working, not at the sachets—she was too disgusted to touch them—but at her last canvas, with a lay figure posed in lieu of the model she could no longer employ. When the sound of someone mounting the stairs caused her heart to quicken its beating, and the tell-tale colour to come and go in her cheeks. It was St.

John, she knew at once; very few men ascended those stairs, and only one with that quick decision born of familiarity. He knocked before entering, a ceremony that he had dispensed with altogether on class days when he had been a student; he did not, however, wait for permission to enter, but opened the door for himself. Jill's mouth hardened obstinately as she glanced casually over her shoulder, and then, feigning not to see the bunch of flowers that he brought and laid humbly on the table as a peace-offering, went unmoved on with her work. She did not rise, did not even offer a word of greeting. St. John spoke first, awkwardly, deprecatingly, uncertain, what to make of her mood.

"Good morning," he said hesitatingly, "I —I was passing and thought I would call."

"Passing here?" interposed Jill incredulously, "what a circuitous route you must have taken to accomplish that."

"Not at all," he answered, "you aren't so

very out of the way. Besides I wanted to come."

"So I supposed," she retorted disagreeably. "But you might have saved yourself the trouble; you were quite safe paying by cheque, you know."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Mean! Why haven't you called for your receipt? I own to having been remiss in not sending it, but I had my reasons; and after all it was only three days since, and a cheque is always pretty safe."

"You know that I haven't called for that," he said angrily. "If I thought you really believed me capable of such an act I would—"

"Well, what?" she asked derisively.

"I don't know," he answered lamely, "clear perhaps. I had forgotten even that a receipt was customary, and certainly never looked for one from you."

"Nothing so business like, I suppose?" snapped Jill. "I should have sent one

though if I had not intended returning the cheque instead. I have no right to that money; I turned you away at a moment's notice, you did not leave of your own accord."

"That's true enough," he ruefully agreed. "Nevertheless the money is due to you; I received the tuition."

"It is not due," replied Jill firmly. "You are making me a present of it, Mr. St. John, and I will not accept such a gift. There is your cheque, take it back if you please."

He took it from her, tore it savagely into pieces, and threw them on the floor.

"So be it," he answered wrathfully. "You must indeed be succeeding as you deserve, to reject what you have lawfully earned."

Jill went white as she generally did when in a rage, and favoured him with a glance that he was not likely to forget in a hurry.

"I have not earned it." she responded, "neither am I succeeding; two facts which you are thoroughly well acquainted with.

Does *that* look like success?" And she drew from the cardboard box the sachets she had brought home again from the shop that morning, and threw them on the table in front of him. "That's the kind of work that I have come to do, and I daresay I shall sink lower yet;—Xmas. cards no doubt. Oh! yes, I have sunk pretty low. The man who gave me that order superintends the work, and corrects errors of detail. He does not like female figures in atmospheric drapery like those. He said the public wouldn't buy them that way; a nude figure on a night-dress bag—he didn't use the word nude, by the way, but plain vulgar English—was too suggestive, and requested me to take them home and paint in a garment—'Just a small one'—as though he were alluding to a vest. Ugh! it makes me sick—it makes me *blush*. He wears his hair oiled, too," she continued retrospectively, forgetting for the minute her resentment against St. John in disgust at her latest patron,

"and—further degradation—makes love to me which for the sake of the miserable commission I dare not resent."

What followed was impardonable on St. John's part but for the life of him he could not resist retaliating for the thrusts that she had given him.

"Perhaps the last is a hallucination," he suggested ungenerously; "You have a tendency to imagine that sort of thing you know."

She eyed him for a moment in stony displeasure, then pointed imperiously to the door.

"You may consider that remark worthy of a gentleman, Mr. St. John," she said, "I don't. You will oblige me by leaving the studio at once; I—I shall be rude to you if you don't."

Her voice broke, and she turned to her work again abruptly, painting with feverish haste as thought she had not a moment to lose. In two strides St. John was behind her, and stooping he put his arms about her

with a swift movement for which she was entirely unprepared, and which imprisoned her so firmly that she could not escape.

"Rude to me if you like," he cried; "but not unkind, Jill—never any more."

Jill had dropped her utensils, and the palette lay paint side downwards on the floor. She put her small hands on St. John's wrists and tried to free herself from his embrace, but the attempt was ineffectual, his arms only tightened round her, and his face bent lower until it was on a level with her own. She looked into his eyes and read in them a laughing mastery that defied her efforts to escape, and, even while it angered her, set her pulses leaping in a wild excitement that was half fear, half gladness. She breathed quickly, and pulled at his wrists again.

"Let me go," she whispered. "How dare you touch me?"

But he only laughed in answer and held her closer to him, and for the first time Jill felt his warm kisses on her lips.

"It's not a bit of good," he said; "you can't get away. I feel as though I could hold you to my heart for ever. You expelled me for a fault that I was not guilty of; I am now going to justify your accusation. Jill, Jill, you foolish child, what are you thinking? Don't shrink away like that, dear. I love you, my darling, my little independent, high-spirited girl. I love every tone of your voice, every fresh mood, wound and vex me though they may at the time. Jill will you marry me?"

"No," Jill answered with curt abruptness. He shook his head at her reprovingly, but looked not the least whit disconcerted.

"Oh! yes, you will," he returned with confidence; "you must if I have to carry you all the way to the Church in my arms like this. I can't let you go again; these last four days have been unbearable. Answer me truly, haven't you found them so too, dear?—just a little sad and lonely, eh Jill?"

"Stand back," she cried still struggling

futilely to shake him off. "You are mad to talk to me the way you are doing, and I should be worse than mad to listen."

"Oh! no, you wouldn't," he replied with gay audacity. "You can't help listening, sweetheart, any more than you can prevent my kissing you. Come, Jill, end this farce and be candid. Is it pique, dear, or what? Why won't you own that you care for me? I know you do."

"Yes. Oh, my God, yes!" she answered, and she broke into violent sobs. "I wish from my heart that I could answer truthfully that I do not."

He was startled at her outburst, and drew back in consternation letting his hands fall to his sides. She was free enough now, but she hardly seemed to realize the fact and made no attempt to rise.

"Jill," he exclaimed, "what is it? What has happened, dear? Won't you tell me?"

But Jill only buried her face in her hands and sobbed on. She would have given any-

thing to have preserved her composure throughout this interview; but once having broken down there was no stemming the torrent; the flood must have its way, and a regular deluge it proved. St. John watched her uneasily for a while, then unable to stand it longer he went up to her again, and putting his arm around her neck, tried to draw her hands away. In a moment she was on her feet facing him, grief changed to indignation, scorn and anger in her eyes, while the tear drops glistened still upon her flushed cheeks, and trembled wet and sparkling on her lashes.

"Don't come near me," she panted; "your touch is hateful to me—keep away, do you hear?"

"Don't worry yourself, my dear girl," he retorted a trifle impatiently it must be confessed. "I have no wish to approach any nearer; indeed I'd rather remain where I am. If you would only tell me what it is all about. instead of flying off at a tangent we might

arrive at a better understanding. Have I done anything to forfeit your regard?"

"Yes," she answered petulantly, "you know you have."

"Should I ask for information which I had already?" he questioned coolly. "Information moreover which is presumedly hardly creditable to myself. What is the something, please?"

Jill looked at him coldly, but he bore her scrutiny well. He was grave, but he certainly did not appear apprehensive, nor was he in the least embarrassed or perturbed.

"What is the something?" he repeated. "I think I have a right to know."

But Jill seemed to find a difficulty in answering, or a disinclination to do so; for she drew herself up and remained silent, an angry spot of colour in either cheek. St. John tapped the floor impatiently with his boot.

"Come, come," he cried, "this is childish to accuse a fellow of some possibly imaginary wrong, and not give him the chance of

refuting it. What heinous offence do you fancy me guilty of? Robbing a bank? I haven't I assure you."

He was turning her doubts of him to ridicule which only angered her the more. There was a gleam of amusement in his eyes and his moustache twitched ever so slightly.

"What! sceptical of that even?" he continued ironically. "So it's my honesty that's called into question, eh?"

"Yes," Jill flashed back with a fierceness born of wounded pride, "your honesty, Mr. St. John. Is it honest of you to come and make love to me? No, you know it is not, it is dishonourable, despicable—"

"Stop a bit," he interrupted with a quietness and control which surprised himself; "don't let us lose ourselves in a labyrinth of adjectives, and so get away from the main subject altogether. Why is it dishonourable for me to make love to you? For, though you will insist to the contrary, I am absolutely ignorant of any prohibitive reason."

"That is impossible," Jill replied, and he flushed at her want of faith in his veracity. "But as you are determined to keep your counsel until you discover how much I know I had better speak out I suppose. You are not free to propose matrimony to me."

St. John's eyebrows went up with a jerk.

"Indeed!" he said. "Your statement is news to me, so also is the very low idea you have formed of my character. In what way am I not free? Do you mean that there is someone else?"

Jill nodded; she could find no words.

"And the lady's name?" he questioned in peremptory tones.

"Miss Bolton," she answered with a visible effort. "I have recently learnt from unquestionable authority that you have been engaged to your cousin for some months."

St. John started, pulled thoughtfully at his moustache for a moment, and then looking up sharply,

"The name of your informant?" he asked.

"Never mind that," Jill answered, "my informant was in a position to know. I have tried to but cannot doubt the assertion."

"And yet you seem to find it easy enough to doubt mine," he said.

She made no reply; and striding up to her he caught her by the shoulders and transfixed her with a gaze at once stern and reproachful.

"Speak," he exclaimed. "I will know who is the lying, interfering mischief-maker who has spread such abominable reports about me."

Jill swayed slightly in his grip, and her glance met his in wide-eyed questioning as though she would read his very soul.

"Ah!" she cried "if it were false! if it were only false!"

"The name?" he repeated impatiently, and almost shook her in his excitement. She hesitated still for a minute, then the answer came unwillingly, more as though his glance compelled the truth than that she gave it voluntarily.

"It was your father," she half whispered, and her eyes sought the floor and stayed there as though she dreaded reading what she might see in his face.

He stared at her for a moment, then he pushed her from him with a laugh.

"Unquestionable authority certainly," he said moodily, and laughed again. Jill remained motionless watching him, uncertain whether he intended denying the allegation or not, and he stood opposite in a towering rage glowering back at her with his brows drawn together in the old bad tempered scowl.

"I suppose," he went on after a pause, "that he communicated this intelligence to you between the time of your writing to me and my first appearance at the art school after your illness?"

"Yes," she replied, "on the Thursday."

"That accounts for your inexplicable bad temper that Friday," he resumed unpleasantly. "Information from such a source must

certainly have been convincing, far more convincing than my contradiction. But did it not strike you to doubt the authenticity of the signature?"

"It was a word of mouth communication," Jill answered coldly, "Mr. St. John honoured me with a visit."

"He came here?" repeated her hearer aghast. "My father? Impossible!"

"It does sound rather improbable I admit," agreed Jill. "It was going to a great deal of trouble over a small matter, wasn't it?—when a penny postage stamp would have done as well. But he seemed more concerned about it than either you or I. Was it likely, do you think, that I should question his statement? Had there been no truth in it why should he have bothered?"

"The only reason I can think of," answered St. John, "was that he merely anticipated his desire. But for you I can find no excuse, not even one so flimsy as that. Why should you place perfect reliance

on the word of a man you did not know, and, putting the worse possible construction on my actions, refuse to give me even the chance of justifying myself?"

"I don't know," retorted Jill ungraciously. "Looked at from your point of view I suppose it appears monstrous, but from my point it seems natural enough. I had no reason to doubt your father's word, and, as you, yourself, informed me that morning you had never spoken a word of love to me in your life. There was no necessity for you to mention your engagement; men not infrequently prefer to conceal the fact from girls of inferior social standing—"

"Stop," he cried, angrily. "This is too much. I could have forgiven the rest, but you go too far."

"I didn't know that I had entreated your forgiveness," she said with a smile which mocked his indignation. "'I love every tone of your voice,'" she mimicked, "'every fresh mood, wound and vex me though they may

at the time.' You have a strange way of showing your affection, Mr. Saint John, an admirable way of disguising it, I should say."

St. John looked furious, and his tormentor continued relentlessly.

"Or is it that now it is wounding and vexing you? To-morrow, I suppose, you will be enamoured of all that I have said and done to-day?"

Then, her mood changing abruptly as the love in her heart reproached her for doubting and vexing him as she had, she went up to the table and buried her face shyly in the flowers he had brought.

"Go away now, my dear Saint," she whispered, "and come to-morrow instead; for I like you enamoured best."

But St. John was angry still, and not so ready to be propitiated. His hat lay on the table where he had placed it near the flowers, and Jill's hand rested beside it—her fingers touching the brim, it may have been by accident though it looked more like design.

"I think I *had* better go," he agreed, reaching out for it; "your opinion of me is not easy to forget, and—"

He had taken hold of his hat; but Jill's small fingers had closed upon the brim on the other side, and kept their hold determinedly.

St. John desisted at once; it was incompatible with his dignity to struggle over his headgear.

"At your pleasure, Miss Erskine," he said.

"It's very strange," mused Jill in a tone of innocent speculation; "do you know that until to-day I had always considered you handsome? What a difference it makes to a face whether it is smiling or glum."

"One can't keep up a perpetual grin," he retorted, but his countenance relaxed a little despite his effort to appear unmoved, and seeing her advantage she followed it up, turning a scene which had been growing painfully strained into a comedy by her deft handling of the situation.

"No; not unless it is natural to one, which

is even a greater affliction. I once heard of a man who had his nose broken for laughing at a quarrelsome individual in the street. As a matter of fact he wasn't laughing; it was only that Nature had endowed him with a perpetual and unavoidable grin. But you are not at all likely to get your nose broken from a similar cause."

"I should hope not," he returned with disagreeable emphasis.

"Is mine on my face still?" enquired Jill putting up her hand to feel. "Why! it actually is. Funny, but I thought you had snapped it off. It is there, isn't it?"

She went quite close to him and held up her face for inspection with a look in her eyes that St. John would have been more than human, or at any rate not genuinely in love, had he resisted. He made no attempt to; he just took the small face between his two hands and kissed it. And then they sat down together on the twill covered box to spoon a little, and afterwards talk matters over from a

practical, common sense view, as Jill declared; though it would have been more sensible had they left the spooning and talked matters over first.

## CHAPTER IX

"I WONDER," mused St. John, stroking Jill's tumbled hair with his right hand, and holding both hers in his left, "why the governor should have come here and told you what he did? It was putting us all in such a false position, and—well, I should have considered it an act altogether beneath him."

Jill sighed and nestled unconsciously a little closer to him.

"Can't we forget all that for to-day," she asked, "and just think only of our two selves? I quite believe you when you say that you are not engaged to your cousin. I think I believed it all along only I was so horribly jealous. I'm jealous still, jealous that she can see you when I can't, and that she has a right to call you Jack—"

"But you have got that right too," he interrupted, "a better right than she has. You will call me Jack, won't you? I call you Jill."

She laughed.

"Doesn't it put you in mind of the nursery rhyme?" she said. "I never thought of it before."

"Yes; let's see, how does it go? We must alter it a little to fit the case, 'Jack and Jill went up the hill to—' we can't say 'fetch a pail of water.'"

"In search of fame together," put in Jill.

"Ah, yes! 'Jack and Jill went up the hill
In search of fame together,
Jack fell down and broke his crown,
And—"

"No," interrupted Jill, "I won't come tumbling after.' You can say that I went on alone."

"But that's so unkind," he objected; "besides it doesn't rhyme."

"Oh! well," she answered after a pause devoted to thinking out a finish to the verse,

"put, 'But Jill goes climbing ever.' That rhymes, and it's true; I'm not going to stop in the valley trying to haul you up."

"You're a disagreeable little prig," he exclaimed. "I should as likely as not be obliged to haul you."

"And I daresay you could manage that," she answered rubbing her cheek against his coat sleeve; "you're big enough goodness knows. I should like to be hauled up and have no more climbing to do, Jack; it would be such a change. But that's too good to come true I'm afraid, it will always be more kicks than coppers it seems to me."

"What do you mean?" asked St. John in astonishment. "There will be no more kicks, Jill, when you are once married to me; I shall take all those."

Jill went on caressing his coat sleeve vigorously, and her hand pressed his with tender warmth.

"We shall never marry, Jack," she said; "we can't."

"Why?" he asked amazed.

"Because we can't live on love, dear; I never did like sweet things much, and you don't like bread and cheese, and stout. I don't much either; but I have to go in for it; it's cheap. Only now I do without the stout—and the cheese also the last day or two."

"But, darling," he exclaimed, not quite certain whether she was joking or not, "you are making troubles where they don't exist. There will be no need to live on bread and cheese and affection—though I should be equal to that even if necessary—I have five hundred a year from my father, and he has promised to increase it when I marry."

"Providing you marry your cousin," Jill interposed. "He would certainly decrease it if you married me. Oh! I know quite well all about it. You forget that he called upon me; he told me so then. And though you love me and I love you we shouldn't be such fools, Jack, as to marry on nothing."

St. John looked glum. He entertained no doubt that his father had resolved upon this plan of deterring him from marrying the girl he wished to, and he determined to thwart him if possible.

"We could get married, and I could come and live here," he suggested brilliantly, "and we could work together; that would be jolly."

Jill smiled at this proposal but shook her head decisively.

"It's no good; it wouldn't answer," she said. "We should fight dreadfully in a month, and then the models would get smashed. And you'd never earn anything at painting, you know; your pictures always require explaining, and your figures are atrocious. I can't think why you will persist in going in for the human form divine; it's most difficult; for any fool can see when a figure's out of drawing except the one who draws it, and you never will learn that green isn't a becoming tint for flesh even in the deep shadows."

St. John heaved a sigh which seemed to proceed from the bottom of his boots. He was too genuinely despondent to resent her slighting criticism of his abilities, or too well aware of its truth perhaps. He rose impatiently, and walked restlessly up and down trying to think. Jill watched him, her own brows knit in a hopeless attempt to solve the difficulty.

"This is a pretty kettle of fish," he exclaimed swinging round so suddenly that he nearly upset the model. "I'm hanged if I see what we are to do."

"My dear boy," remonstrated Jill in tones of apprehension, "do mind the lay figure. I am trying to finish this canvas with its sole aid," pointing to the work that she had been engaged upon at his entry—a female figure recumbent on a night rainbow. "I can't possibly employ a model, unless perhaps for a final sitting when I know that I shall see so many mistakes it will be a case of repainting it."

Then St. John had a happy inspiration.

"Wouldn't I do?" he asked in all good faith. "I'm bigger, of course; but I'd be better than a lay figure, and I don't mind posing for you a bit."

Jill broke into a laugh, the first laugh of thorough enjoyment that she had had for days.

"Ye gods!" she cried, "what next I wonder?" Then she got up and put her two arms about his neck.

"Dear old boy," she said gratefully, "I believe you'd stand on your head if I wanted you to. But no, dear, I won't pose you as 'The Shepherd's Delight,' I'm sore afraid you wouldn't do at all."

Well the end of it all was that Jill absolutely refused to marry St. John on the understanding that they should pick up a precarious livelihood by their combined artistic efforts, though she was quite willing that he should speak to his father again on the subject if he deemed it of any use. She also

thought that Miss Bolton should be apprised of what had taken place, and for the rest things would go on just as usual, only he would attend the Art School again, and, as he himself stipulated, pop in as often as he chose. Then Jill went and put her hat on at his request, and they strolled out to lunch somewhere, and afterwards spent the rest of the day as they liked, which wasn't among pictures as one would have imagined from two such lovers of art. In the first place St. John drove to a jewellers and placed a handsome solitaire ring on the third finger of Jill's left hand, then they attended a matinée at one of the theatres, and in the evening he took her to Frascatti's to dinner. There were several men there whom he knew and saluted in passing. They bowed back and stared hard at the dowdy little girl he escorted, wondering where he had unearthed her, and why? That night Jill tasted champagne for the first time, and its effect upon her spirits was decidedly exhilarating. She liked cham-

pagne, she said, and St. John laughed at the naivete of both manner and remark. When he asked her where she would like to finish up the evening she suggested a Music Hall; for there one could talk while the performance was going on. So they drove to Shaftsbury Avenue, and St. John got one of the comfortable little curtained boxes at the Palace where one can enjoy the stage if one wishes to, or sit back and not pay any attention to it at all. Jill liked the Living Pictures best. She almost forgot in the delight of watching that they were actually animate and not marvellously painted canvasses by some master hand. But St. John rather spoiled the effect by remarking that they were 'leggy,' whereat she told him that he was horrid; nevertheless she noticed how very quietly the house received these artistic representations; but it was the quietness of appreciation had she known it—the appreciation which enjoys, yet with a very common mock modesty fears to be detected enjoying. Jill glanced at her

lover as he sat back watching her instead of the stage with a smile of quiet amusement on his face.

"They are lovely, Jack," she said. "I should like to carry them all home in reality as I shall in my mind's eye. But this is the wrong audience to exhibit such things to."

And St. John agreed with her, though he was by no means certain as to the soundness of her logic, but he would have agreed to anything just then; he was in the idiotic, inconsequent stage of love sickness, and had got it fairly badly.

When the Music Hall was over he suggested a late supper somewhere, but Jill was firm in her refusal; so they drove straight to her lodgings where St. John alighted and opened the door for her, and embraced her several times in the dirty passage before he finally allowed her to shut him out and go on up to her room. And that night she fell asleep with her cheek pressed to the

diamond ring, and a smile of perfect happiness parting her lips.

The next morning Jill went to work on the sachets again, though it was with the utmost difficulty that she managed to concentrate her thoughts upon anything at all save Jack and the new ring. As it was, her ideas kept wandering, and she caught herself every now and again breaking off into song —snatches of Music Hall choruses that she had heard the night before. And then in the midst of it in walked St. John, and seeing what she was doing he took the satin away from her in his masterful fashion, and crumpled it up in his hands before her horrified gaze.

"You said that the smirking idiot who gave you these to do made love to you," he said. "I won't brook any oily rivals of that description."

Jill laughed. She rather enjoyed the idea of his being jealous.

"I thought you said that that was a hal-

lucination," she retorted. "I was almost prepared to believe you and to think that the next time he chucked me under the chin, or put his arm round my waist that it was only my vivid imagination."

"He did that?" cried St. John fiercely.

"Oh, dear! yes; several times."

"Give me his address," commanded her lover. "I'll stop his love-making propensities. Where does this greasy Lothario hang out?"

But Jill was too discreet to say.

"I forget," she answered lamely; "I never was good at locality. Don't look so savage, Jack; he only chucked me under the chin once, and I washed my face well directly I got back, indeed I did; I scrubbed so hard that I rubbed the skin off, I remember, and it was sore for two days."

"You ought to have returned the work at once," grumbled St. John. "I am surprised at your taking it after that."

"Surprised!" she repeated. "You wouldn't

have been so astonished had you lived for a few days on a stale crust, and expected to dine the next off the crumbs if by good luck there happened to be any crumbs left."

"Oh! Jill," he exclaimed, "I'm a brute dear. Has it ever been as bad as that, my poor little girl?"

Jill nodded affirmatively, and then let her head recline contentedly against his shoulder, glad to nestle within the comforting security of his strong arms, and feel that there she could find both shelter and defence.

"Have you told your father yet?" she asked a little nervously.

"No, dear," he answered Then added quickly, "I will some time to-day, though."

"Yes," she said, "don't put it off any longer; I think that he ought to know; and yet I feel somehow that his knowing will put an end to all this pleasant fooling. Oh! Jack, I'm such a horrid little coward, I know I am."

She lifted her face, and he saw that she was

laughing even though the tears stood in her eyes.

"If you feel like that," he said tenderly, kissing the upturned face, "why not get married first and tell him afterwards?"

"Oh! Jack, fie," she cried; "you are turning coward too."

"Not I," he contradicted stoutly, then added with a smile, "I think I am though; I'm so terribly afraid of your slipping through my fingers, you eel."

"Oh, you dear!" whispered Jill softly. "It *is* nice to have someone wanting you so badly as all that. I won't slip through though; I am far too comfortable where I am."

## CHAPTER X

THE following day, St. John entered the studio with a face the gravity of which boded no good for their plans, Jill feared. She knew at once that his father had refused to countenance the match, and although she had not dared to hope for his sanction, the knowledge that he had positively denied it came upon her with a sense of shock. Not for one moment did she think of resenting his objection, nor of questioning his right to forbid the marriage, she just crept within the shelter of St. John's arms and stayed there, her face, with its flush of mortification, hidden against his breast.

"The governor's a silly old fool," St. John exclaimed savagely, thinking less, perhaps, of the girl's discomfort than his own personal

grievances. "He's cut me off with nothing —at least five hundred pounds; he gave me a cheque for that amount before giving me the kick out."

"We won't take it," Jill cried wrathfully with the improvident contempt of the penniless, "We won't touch a farthing of it, will we?"

"Oh; yes, we will," he answered. "We'll get married on it in the first place, and then live on the rest for so long as it will last."

"I wouldn't get married on that five hundred pounds for anything," Jill said firmly.

"Well, I'm going to," he replied, "I'm going to see about it now. We'll go before a Registrar—much nicer than Church, you know, doesn't take so long. And then I'm going to invest the rest with a little capital that I have by me in a snug little business —haberdashery, or something of the kind; I'm not quite sure what, though I thought about nothing else all last night."

Jill gave a quiet laugh.

"My dear old boy," she said, "you must allow me a say in that matter if you please. I wouldn't let you have a haberdashery; I'd sooner that you were a pork butcher at once."

"No good," he answered. "I've thought of that too; but I couldn't kill a pig for love or money. I could measure out a yard or two of ribbon though, and sell worsted stockings to old women. I say, Jill, what do you think of a photographic studio?—That's the next best thing to art."

Jill had a fine contempt for photography, and said so, but St. John was rather taken with the new idea, and as he pointed out while he did the mechanical work she could paint portraits and enlargements, and have a kind of Art Gallery as well. He spoke with a cheery confidence that showed that he fully expected her to fall in with his plan immediately and be struck as he was with the brilliance of the idea. But for once Jill's spirit seemed to have deserted her, and she

turned away with a catch in her voice, and quite a forlorn expression in the grey eyes which a moment ago had been smiling into his.

"Oh, Jack, don't!" she cried. "I can't bear to listen to you. My poor old saint I wish that you had never met me."

"Stop that," commanded St. John sharply. "You make me feel such a beastly cad—the son of a beastlier cad—"

She turned and laid her hand upon his lips, shaking her head at him reprovingly.

"Your language isn't fit for a stable," she said in her elder sister, teacher-to-pupil tone. "I can't have you calling people names here. Besides what I said need not have excited your risability like that. I meant it in all sincerity; it is a pity as things have turned out; I was quite happy here working by myself, and got along fairly comfortably, and I think now that we have had our pleasant fooling and the crisis is reached I should like to offer you your freedom."

"Thank you," he answered grimly, and he stood looking down from his six feet of brawny manhood upon the small determined figure in front of him busily engaged in withdrawing the ring—her sole article of jewellery—from the third finger of her left hand. She held the shining circlet, emblem of their mutual love, towards him with a smile upon her lips, but he made no attempt to take it though he understood the significance of her action well enough.

"Wouldn't you like to keep it to wear on the other hand?" he enquired sarcastically. "It isn't etiquette, I know; but ladies do it sometimes, I believe."

"But your freedom?" Jill persisted, still holding the ring before his eyes. "Won't you take that?"

"Oh, certainly," he replied disagreeably, "but *that* doesn't constitute my freedom, does it?" with a contemptuous glance at the small golden hoop in her hand.

"No, I suppose not," the girl answered in

a voice of such blank disappointment that St. John grinned despite his ill humour; her lugubrious expression aroused his mirth. Jill saw nothing to laugh at. The situation had assumed for her quite a tragic aspect, and her eyes blazed with a very wrathful light as she gazed witheringly up into his broadly smiling face.

"I don't see," she observed icily, "that my remark called for any violent ebulition of mirth. I wasn't aware that I had said anything funny. Is there insanity in your family?"

"Not that I know of," he replied, taking possession of both ring and hand as he spoke, and keeping his hold despite her angry attempt to free herself. "'Pon my word, Jill, you're enough to try a fellow's patience. You deserved to be taken at your word just now, and didn't expect to be, that's the joke. And now I've got to put this ring back in its place, I suppose. The next time that you take it off for the childish satisfaction of dangling it an inch from my nose I shall keep it and give it to some other girl."

"Miss Bolton perhaps?" remarked Jill in her nastiest tone.

"Don't you think it would be better," he suggested without looking at her, "to leave Evie's name out of our disputes?"

"I don't know whether you consider it gentlemanly," Jill cried fiercely, "to try and make me feel mean?"

"I'm glad if I have succeeded in making you feel it," he answered imperturbably, patting the ring in place, and slowly releasing her hand, "for you certainly are mean. Your meanness is, in fact, only to be equalled by your bad temper and that exceeds it. I am not blind to your faults you may observe; they are as plentiful as flies in summer, and equally irritating."

"And to think," exclaimed Jill in exasperation, "that I was going to give you up just for your personal benefit! I won't now; if you try to back out of it I'll have you up for breach of promise."

"You will, will you? Jove! I almost

believe you would. And you'd win your case too, for if you looked as belligerent as you do at present the jury would be afraid to give it against you. It isn't a bit of use, Jill, getting nasty; I'm in such an angelic frame of mind myself that not even you could put me out. Get your hat on, old girl, and let's go and look for our shop together. We are going to become public benefactors, and hand down to posterity the idealized representatives of the present generation."

Jill smiled scornfully.

"I am sorry for the idealization if you are going to operate; they'll be more like caricatures I'm thinking. What do you know about photography?"

"Know about it!" echoed St. John indignantly. "Why I've got a camera of my own; Evie and I used to dabble a good deal in photography at one time."

"It strikes me that you *dabbled* in a great many things," retorted Jill. "Perhaps that accounts for the very indifferent manner in

which you do everything. If you are counting on your amateur efforts solely, I fear we shall end in the bankruptcy court."

"Jill," he said very gravely, and in such an altered tone that Jill looked up in surprise, "are you afraid to throw in your lot with mine now that my circumstances are almost as destitute and uncertain as your own?"

Jill gave a gasp. For a moment she looked as if about to offer an indignant protest, the next she dissolved into tears. St. John's half formed suspicions faded immediately. His father had planted them in his mind the night before. He had said "tell her that you are penniless and see how sincere her love will prove." The girl's uncertain mood had recalled the words to his memory but he knew as soon as he had spoken by the look in her eyes that he had entirely misjudged her.

"How can you say such unkind things?" she cried. "I believe you are trying to make me hate you."

"Darling," he said contritely, slipping his arm about her, and holding her closely to him, "forgive me; I didn't mean it, indeed I didn't."

"You did," sobbed Jill. "You thought that I had been running after you as a good speculation—"

"Don't, dear," he entreated, "you make me feel so ashamed of myself."

"And so you ought to," she answered, drying her eyes on the corner of her painting apron, and looking up at him with a very woebegone face. "I shall never forget that, I'm afraid; I have a horrid memory for cruel things, and I have loved you so truly all the time. I would go through a dozen bankruptcy courts with you, and—and—and end up in the work-house even sooner than lose you now."

She dropped her head again with a fresh burst of tears, and St. John felt as intensely miserable as it is possible for a man to feel, intensely ashamed of himself also for giving

voice to such an unjust suspicion. He racked his brains in search of something soothing, but the only thing he could find to say was,

"Don't keep hitting a fellow when he's down, Jill."

It wasn't a very brilliant, nor a very original remark, but it was the very luckiest thing he could have hit upon. Its effect on Jill was marvellous; she recollected what she might have remembered sooner, that he had been passing through very stormy times lately, and all on her account. A man does not generally relish breaking with his family and throwing up a luxurious home for the doubtful prospect of earning his own living when he has not been brought up to any profession, and hasn't a superabundance of capital to launch him into a going concern. St. John had certainly not relished it, but he had made no complaint and had met his ill fortune with a cheerfulness and pluck which did him infinite credit. Jill mopped her eyes

again vigorously and put both arms around his neck.

"I have been horrid," she said; "I have done nothing but worried you ever since you came, and you were worried enough before. Jack dear, I'm afraid we shall quarrel dreadfully after we are married. I really am bad tempered, and you are not—not altogether amiable, are you?"

St. John laughed.

"I don't care," he said, "so long as we make it up again. Rows are like hills in cycling, beastly at first, but when you're used to 'em a flat road seems dreadfully monotonous."

Jill saw very little of her fiancé during the next week. He was busy looking for something to do! for she had declared that until he found permanent occupation their marriage must be postponed; she was not going to take such a serious plunge on the strength of the five hundred pounds. St. John acknowledged the wisdom of her decision but chafed

at the delay. Having been ejected from the paternal roof he was anxious to have a home of his own, and more than anxious to see Jill at the head of his frugal board. He was not quite sure how Jill existed; it worried him rather to think of her poverty; but she would take no assistance from him. Once he deprecatingly offered her a ten pound note which she however firmly refused. She would not allow him to support her until he had the right to do so.

"Don't you think that that's rather straining at a gnat?" he said.

"Perhaps," she answered smiling. "But you would not like to think that your coming had lessened my pride and independence, and made me lazy and unselfreliant, would you? If I actually need assistance I will come to you, dear old boy."

And so he had gone forth in search of a livelihood more than ever anxious for the ceremony to come off, and not a little eager to commence the new life of independence

and hard work. St. John had a friend who knew everything. There is a difference between a man who knows everything and the man who thinks he does ; St. John's friend was the right sort, and he put him in the way of the very thing he was looking for. A photographer of the firm of Thompkins and Co., having recently dissolved partnership through the Co., setting up for himself was advertising through the regular channels for a new partner. St. John's friend having some slight acquaintance with Thompkins introduced the two, and eventually St. John invested his capital and returned to the studio in triumph to inform Jill with much pride and satisfaction that he represented the Co. in 'Thompkins and Co.—photographers.'

## CHAPTER XI

"AND now, Mrs. St. John, I think we'll go and have lunch," Jill's new husband remarked as they stood together outside the Registrar's office, the sun shining brightly on the two faces, his quietly amused, hers a little grave and wondering at the importance of the now irrevocable step which they had taken. At the sound of her new name Jill smiled. "It will be our wedding breakfast," she said.

"So it will. We'll have fizz and go a buster—a man dosen't get married every day. I didn't sleep a wink last night, Jill for thinking of it."

Jill hadn't slept either. In morbid retrospection, half sweet, half painful, she had spent the night in the empty studio—empty because St. John had had every stick of hers

removed to her new home, even to the remains of the Clytie that he had broken, and which had been carefully preserved among Jill's other treasures as too sacred to be thrown away. She looked up at him, the memory of all his thoughtfulness adding an increased tenderness to the loving smile that chased the momentary sadness from her face.

"You're a goose, my big boy," she said slipping her hand through his arm as she spoke with a very unwonted display of affection. "And how nice to feel that you are my boy—my very own. No one can part us now, Jack; not all the spiteful machinations of the tyrannical, disagreeable, up-to-date parent can come between you and me, dear, nor alter the fact that we are man and wife."

"That's true," replied St. John with mock resignation. "There's no getting out of it edgeways; for there is a helpless finality about matrimony that carries its own conviction. Jill, my dear, you look uncommonly nice in that gown."

Jill laughed contentedly. He had told her that three times already but she had not the least objection to hearing him say it again. She patted the grey folds of her dress with her grey-gloved hand, and tried to get a glimpse of herself in the shop windows as they passed. It was a very simple costume, and a very serviceable one in light tweed. She had managed to dispose of some work lately and had felt justified in being a little extravagant; though the extravagance had not gone further than buying the necessary materials; her own busy fingers had fashioned the costume with the aid of experience and a paper pattern, and the result was highly satisfactory and very creditable from the top of the smart little toque to the soles of her neat new walking-shoes.

"Where shall we go?" enquired Jill serenely.

"To Frascatti's," he answered, and to Frascatti's they went accordingly. St. John ordered a very recherchê little lunch although he was fully aware that even in small matters

it was necessary to practise the strictest economy, but, as he argued in answer to Jill's expostulations, it was out of all reason to expect a man to be economical on his wedding day.

"I'm afraid it's out of all reason to expect you to be economical at all, my dear saint," remarked his wife sweetly, slowly withdrawing her gloves, and regarding her very new wedding ring with marked complacency. "I shall have to keep the purse, that's evident, and dole you out an allowance."

"It'll put me in mind of my schoolboy days," laughed St. John, "when I received sixpence a week, and very often had that confiscated in payment of fines."

"I can quite imagine it," retorted Jill with a grave little shake of the head. "It is strange considering what horrid little wretches boys generally are how really nice some of them grow up."

St. John laughed again; the compliment was intended for him, and he appropriated it.

He paused in the act of taking his soup to look across at his small wife. Never had he felt more supremely happy and contented than he did at that moment. He had a careless habit of living solely in the present, turning his back on the past, and deliberately refusing to look into the future—that future which with its work, its independence, and its possible poverty meant so much to them both, and would prove not only a test to the strength of his manhood but to the sincerity of their mutual love. To-day he was determined to put such thoughts on one side; it was his wedding morning and he meant to enjoy himself. He turned his attention from his wife's face to the study of the wine card, and ran his eye quickly down the list.

"Do you like your wine dry?" he asked.

"Um?" queried Jill.

"Do you like dry wines?"

"How funny!" she said. "I didn't know there was such a thing. I don't think I should; I'm so thirsty."

St. John looked the tiniest shade put out, the waiter stared, and a good-looking man with a lightish moustache who happened to be passing their table at the moment glanced down at the small grey figure in careless amusement. Jill flushed, suddenly conscious of having said the wrong thing, and the man behind her, looking from her to her companion and recognising the latter, wondered what country cousin St. John had got hold of now.

"I don't know much about it," she admitted in a slightly vexed tone, "but I liked what we had here before."

St. John gave his order; then he looked into the troubled grey eyes opposite and smiled reassuringly. As he did so he caught sight of the man near Jill's chair; he was about to seat himself at the next table, but before he could do so St. John rose and intercepted him.

"Markham!" he exclaimed. "This is luck. I thought you were abroad."

"Only returned last night," the other answered shaking hands. "Glad to see you again, St. John. All well at home?"

"I don't know," St John replied; "haven't been there lately. Come over to our table, old boy; we wanted someone to drink our health."

Markham elevated his eyebrows in a show of surprise. St. John had hold of him by the arm, and he allowed himself to be drawn forward until he stood facing the little girl in grey, not quite clear even then as to how matters stood.

"Jill," exclaimed her husband, "allow me to introduce you to Mr. Markham, a very old pal of mine."

Jill held out her hand with a smile. She was a little disappointed that St. John had so readily ended their tête-à-tête luncheon, but she carefully refrained from letting him see it, and graciously seconded the invitation which the stranger appeared by no means reluctant to accept. He took the seat on her

right hand and looked her over with a glance that was at once curious and puzzled. She was a lady that was evident, though different in most respects to those he was accustomed to meet; what he could not rightly fix was the relationship between her and St. John. When he left England he had understood that the latter was to marry his cousin—it had been for that reason that he had gone abroad—and yet a moment ago St. John had distinctly asked him to 'drink our health.' Whose health? And why?

"This is a very festive occasion you are participating in, Markham," St. John observed gaily. "It is my wedding day. As the only guest present we look to you for a speech."

Mr. Markham stared incredulously first at St. John, and then at his wife. Suddenly he caught sight of Jill's new ring—the plain gold circlet seemed to carry conviction with it. He bowed to Jill and impulsively held out his hand to St. John.

"My congratulations, old fellow," he cried warmly, "my very sincere and hearty congratulations. By jove! I am surprised. But—"

He paused. He had been going to ask 'what about Miss Bolton?' but bethought him in time that it might not be a welcome topic to the bride.

"You don't congratulate *me*," said Jill smiling, "and yet you might do that more readily because you know Jack and you don't know me. I feel quite apprehensive; I've taken him for better and *worse*, you know."

Mr. Markham laughed.

"I think your having done so does infinite credit to your judgment, Mrs. St. John," he said. "I wish you both every happiness and success."

"Thank you," Jill answered: "I feel reassured and good wishes are always most acceptable."

"To wish success in our case is very appropriate too," struck in St. John. "I'm

going to give you another surprise now, old fellow; I've set up in business on my own."

"Eh?" enquired Mr. Markham, putting down his wineglass and staring at his friend. St. John whipped a card out of his pocket and laid it on the table cloth.

"When you want your photograph taken," he observed in some amusement, "go to that address, my boy, and you'll get taken as you never were before. I'm the Co., and I go into harness a week from to-day."

To say that Mr. Markham was astonished would be to express his sensations very inadequately he was astounded—almost incredulous. He looked at St. John's smiling face, and then at Jill's grave, matter-of-fact one, and ejaculated "By George!" in a tone that made St. John laugh more than ever.

"It's a fact," observed the latter. "Put the card in your pocket and advertise the firm a bit at the club and elsewhere. Besides you'll know my address then, though,

of course, it is quite permissable for you to forget that if you want to."

Mr. Markham took up the card in silence, read it, placed it carefully in his pocket-book, and sitting back in his chair fell to laughing immoderately as though it were a huge joke. He had grasped the situation immediately when he had quite taken in the news. He had wondered that Jack and his wife should be having their wedding breakfast at Frascatti's, and alone; but now he understood. He knew that St. John, Senior, was bent on marrying his son to Miss Bolton, and he also knew that St. John possessed no private means. He had evidently run contrary to the paternal wishes and this was the outcome. What a fool he was to be sure! To chuck up quarter of a million and pretty Evie Bolton for—

"You must really excuse me, Mrs. St. John," he exclaimed meeting Jill's surprised, and slightly disapproving glance with easy frankness, "but it's just immense to hear Jack

talk about work ; I don't suppose he has done a hand's turn in his life."

Jill lifted her eyes to her husband's with unconcealed pride in her look.

" It doesn't follow that he won't be able to do it," she answered confidently. " You none of you seem to have understood him. He is full of pluck and perseverance, only he has always been discouraged."

"We understood the old Jack well enough," Markham responded. " But there comes a crisis in some men's lives when their whole nature undergoes a complete change. It doesn't always last ; they often go back to the original state which means disappointment, and sometimes disillusionment too. I don't mean that St. John is likely to go back, I was merely—"

" Preparing me," suggested Jill.

" No ; wandering off into personal experience—a mistake at any time, unpardonable under existing circumstances. I won't forget to advertise the show, old man," he continued

turning to St. John, "and, if I may, will book to-day fortnight for a sitting. I rather enjoy having my portrait taken, and don't mind promising to become a regular customer. I think I can bring some others as well."

"Thank's awfully," answered St. John. "It will be good for me if I can introduce some fresh customers. I have posted the old man a card. Wouldn't it be a huge joke if I had the honour of photographing my own father?"

Jill made a little grimace, and then the three of them laughed uproariously till Markham, raising his glass on high, drank to the health and prosperity of bride and bridegroom, and confusion to their enemies.

"It is rather unfortunate having enemies at the outset of one's married life, don't you think?" observed Jill a little wistfully.

"Well, I don't know; I always fancy an enemy or two enhance, by comparison, the value of one's friends."

"Yes, perhaps—if one has friends."

"You cannot persuade me that *you* will not find plenty as you go through life," Markham answered gallantly.

"They are a long time coming," she rejoined with a smile, "but that is generally the case where money is scarce, isn't it? And Jack and I are horribly poor. We are going to live over the shop, you know, in three rooms and a kitchen. We are lucky to get so many; old Thompkins—"

"My dear Jill," interposed her husband, "you must really learn to speak more respectfully of the head of the firm."

"Old Thompkins," went on Jill imperturbably, "has only two. But then, of course, he's a bachelor. I think I shall flirt with him! it might be a stroke of business, eh?"

Markham and St. John both laughed.

"You're all right," ejaculated the former. "You can safely leave yourself in your wife's hands; it is not difficult to foresee that old Thompkins will be speedily bowled out."

"He might be a misogynist," suggested Jill.

"They are the easiest to get over because they imagine themselves invulnerable," he replied. "I knew one once, but he married long ago. I forgot to ask him to explain the inconsistency, but it seems to have answered very well."

"I'm glad of that," said Jill gravely. Then catching his eye she smiled. "It would have been such a strong point against us if he had found it a mistake after all," she explained.

He smiled too. There was something about St. John's small wife that unconsciously attracted him; he could not help thinking what a capital friend she would make if a fellow were in trouble and in need of advice, though why he should arrive at such a conclusion he could not guess; so far they had exchanged nothing but very slight commonplaces.

"I feel I must contradict you there," he said. "Had he found it a mistake it would most probably have been his fault; people with decided principles are generally difficult."

"Don't," cried Jill, "you make me nervous. Jack may have decided principles for aught I know—he's got a decided temper, and I'm horribly afraid Ilfracombe will make it worse.

"So you propose spending the week at Ilfracombe?"

"Yes. I stayed there with my father once while he painted the Coast, so Jack is taking me there for auld lang syne."

"It's bracing," struck in St. John, with a commendable determination to have nothing sad, not even reminiscences, on his wedding-day. "Any place would do me, but the little woman really wants setting up."

"You will be putting up at the 'Ilfracombe,' I suppose?" observed Mr. Markham, conversationally.

"My dear fellow," returned St. John, "you don't seem to quite realise our position. We belong to the working-class, and will have to hunt out cheap rooms when we get there."

"Ah! Well, diggings are more convenient in many ways, and more private, too." And

Mr. Markham, raising his wine-glass to his lips, drained it quickly, as though he were swallowing something beside Heidsieck, as no doubt he was.

## CHAPTER XII

CHEAP apartments are not easily obtainable at watering places in the summer, that is apartments which combine cheapness with a certain amount of comfort. It was Jill who pointed out the likeliest locality to search in, and who finally discovered what they wanted after many fruitless enquiries. They did not suit St. John's taste, however much they might his pocket. He would have pronounced them impossible at once had not Jill firmly maintained that they would do. She had had to study economy so much all her life that she was easily pleased, and really considered the rooms quite good enough for what they required.

"They are," she observed cheerfully as

soon as they were alone together, "clean and comfortable. To me, after my old attic, they are more—they are luxurious. And the air is perfectly delightful."

St John glanced round the tiny sitting-room with its cheap saddle-bag suite, and uncompromisingly hard sofa, and endeavoured to see things from her point of view, but with no very marked success. He was losing sight of the romance of poverty, in the realization of its sordidness. He hated cheap lodgings and all their attendant discomforts, and his dissatisfaction was written plainly on his face.

"It might have been worse," he answered disparagingly.

Jill bit her lip and turned to look out of the window. He followed her example, and his discontent increased.

"Not much of an outlook on somebody's bean patch," he grumbled. "Deuce of a nuisance we didn't go nearer the sea."

"Sea view appartments are beyond our

figure," she returned. "Besides you ought not to want any outlook, nor anything else except me."

St. John's ill-humour vanished, and he smiled as he put his arm round her shoulders and drew her nearer to his side.

"I don't," he asseverated.

"Then what are you grumbling at?"

"I wasn't; I was only wishing that things were a little nicer for you."

"That's very kind of you, dear, but you might wait until I complain before you begin throwing a damper on things. I think that everything is lovely, only—who is to manage the landlady, Jack? I'm sure I daren't; she looks as if she would stick on the extras. We must do our own marketing, and she won't like that, I suppose."

St. John looked uneasy.

"You always said," he remarked in a reminiscent manner, "that you would never allow your husband to interfere in domestic concerns; it wasn't a man's work."

"Well, you are a coward," cried Jill; "big men generally are. And she's only a little woman, not any bigger than I."

"Little women are so vindictive," he retorted. "I shouldn't have minded how big she had been, but I did mind the way in which she looked us over and said, 'You'll have breakfast at eight-thirty, I suppose? I can let you have some butter that I've got in house.' Eight-thirty is such a commonplace plebeian hour, and sums up one's social status so exactly, and why couldn't she say in 'the' house?"

"Oh! don't be so ridiculous," replied Jill, "she is a Devonshire woman, of course, which makes a difference. But I don't want her butter; I'm sure it isn't good and that's why she is anxious to get rid of it."

"Then why didn't you tell her so instead of saying thank you?"

"I hadn't the moral courage to," Jill admitted frankly. "I don't know why you didn't help me out. If you were half a man

you wouldn't allow me to be worried on my honeymoon."

"It's my honeymoon too," protested St. John. "I don't see why I should be worried either. Jill, dear, run and put your hat on we can't stay all the evening in this pokey room. Let's go out catering for to-morrow and have a peep at the sea."

So with a laugh Jill went to do his bidding and together they sallied forth like a pair of children, or two sea-side trippers who having come for a week's holiday, intend making the most of their time. They turned their footsteps towards the sea, and sauntered along the steep winding path up the cliff for the sake of the view, and the breezes, and to catch sight of the little paddle steamers passing in the distance. They talked a great deal of nonsense, and St. John painted a golden future as background to the rosy present till Jill almost believed that the insignificant firm of Thompkins and Co. was the gilded gate to fortune, and Jack's the

lucky hand to hold the key. Markham's name cropped up in the course of conversation. St. John introduced it, as he had the owner, unexpectedly, and apropos of nothing that had gone before.

"How did you like Markham?" he enquired. "Not a bad sort, is he?"

Jill looked dubious, and puckered her brows thoughtfully.

"I don't know," she answered. "I am not sure whether if I knew him better I should like him a little, or dislike him a great deal. Why did you ask him to come and spoil our lunch?"

"I didn't, I asked him to come and drink our health."

"But why?" she protested. "We didn't want any horrid third person. What would you have thought if I had asked a girl?"

"I should have thought it inconsiderate of you from a monetary point of view, otherwise a charming arrangement."

"You are a brute," cried Mrs. St. John

pettishly. "I'm not enjoying my honeymoon a bit."

"People never do," he rejoined; "It isn't fashionable, besides its bad taste. I am afraid that I'm going to prove an exception to the rule though; for I don't know when I have enjoyed anything so much as to-day. Beastly form on my part to admit it, I know. But to return to Markham, I asked him to join us for several reasons, not the least important being a natural desire to introduce my wife—"

"Yes, dear, I'll excuse the preliminaries," interposed Jill. "I want to know the real reason."

"You aggravating monkey, I've a good mind not to satisfy you. And I daresay you will be aggrieved when you hear it because it concerns Evie."

"Oh! Was he in love with *her*?"

St. John laughed at the disparaging tone and teasingly pinched her ear.

"Incredible as it may sound he was," he

replied. "I believe she refused him a little while ago but he has been out of England since then and I never heard the rights of the case. He's an old college chum of mine, and an awfully good sort; I don't know why Evie doesn't have him."

"Oh, yes, you do," rejoined Jill sagely. "And so you thought you would let Mr. Markham see that you were married and out of the runnings, you conceited old humbug; and that's why he laughed so much, and was so very polite to me. He'll send us a wedding present, Jack, I feel convinced of that."

"You've always got your eye open for the main chance," observed St. John, "and ought to make a good business woman. You'll be pondering the intrinsic value of that present within half-an-hour. Personally, I shall be thoroughly satisfied if I hear that he wins Evie."

Jill looked up at him swiftly, and slipped her hand into his with a smile.

"I don't mind who wins Evie now," she said, "but I was horribly anxious once. I don't believe that I really felt quite safe until this little gold band was placed on my finger, and then I knew that not even Miss Bolton could take you away from me."

"Possession is only nine-tenths of the law," interposed St. John; but he squeezed the small hand lovingly, lying so confidingly in his, so that, feeling the pressure, and meeting his earnest gaze, Jill was too thoroughly happy even to retort.

## CHAPTER XIII

MR. ST. JOHN, Sen.'s., wrath knew no bounds when he received his son's note and learnt that he had taken the irrevocable step and actually married the art mistress. He passed the letter on to his niece with Thompkins & Co.'s., card, and turned away from the lunch-table too disgusted to eat his food. Evie Bolton took things more quietly. She had realized her defeat from the first, and accepted it as she did the announcement of her cousin's marriage with a composure that did more credit to her head than to her heart. She read the letter through without comment, and studied the card. Then she looked up with a little laugh.

"How funny," she said. "I will go and have my photograph taken there."

Mr. St. John said nothing. He just wheeled about shortly and left the room, but when he got outside his language was more forcible than polite, and he kicked Miss Bolton's pet pug right across the hall. For the first time he saw the heiress with his son's eyes.

"Jack is a fool," mused Miss Bolton complacently, tapping the pasteboard in a meditative fashion. "He will hate it all three months hence, and then they will quarrel horribly. A photographer indeed! What possessed him, I wonder?"

When Miss Bolton flippantly observed that she intended having her photograph taken at Thompkins & Co.'s., she did not mean it seriously; for she had not considered the matter, and only spoke upon impulse. Some months later, however, the idea returning to her mind, she determined, after thinking it over for a little while, to act upon it, and judge for herself how Jack adapted himself to his changed circumstances.

It was characteristic of her that she should

don her richest attire for the occasion, and drive there in style instead of going in the quietest and most unobtrusive manner; and it was also characteristic that on arriving and entering the shop she should haughtily demand to see Mr. St. John, entirely ignoring Jill, who, on her entry, had risen from her seat at the desk, and now in her usual philosophic manner walked quietly out of the shop to call her husband. St. John was in the studio endeavouring to snap an infant in its vest, and only succeeding in making it howl. He was looking worried and annoyed, and welcomed Jill's advent with relief.

"You are better at this kind of thing than I am," he said in an aside to her; "just see if you can pacify the little beast."

"All right," answered Jill shortly. "You can go and do the agreeable to Evie Bolton; she's in the shop waiting to see you."

St. John whistled, and the infant stopped yelling to listen; it was noted for its love of music.

"How jolly nice of her," he cried. "Perhaps she'll stay and have tea with us."

"Perhaps she won't," Jill answered rather bitterly; but St. John was not paying any attention; he was busy adjusting the collar of his coat, and failed to detect the chagrin in his wife's tone and manner. Jill turned her back on him quickly to hide her annoyance, and walked over to make friends with the baby, while St. John, unconscious that anything was amiss, strode through the studio into the shop where Evie Bolton awaited him. She turned at his entry and advaned to greet him, recognising with a little pang of envy as she did so, what a fine, manly, handsome fellow this cousin of her's was. St. John, too, realized for the first time how very pretty and stylish Evie was. When he had lived with stylish women he had not noticed these things, now that his lot was cast among the working classes, he perceived and appreciated the difference. His glance rested on

ss Bolton's well groomed prettiness with a

kind of tired relief, and the sordidness of his own surroundings became more apparent.

"It is good of you to look us up," he cried. "I half feared that I was going to get the cold shoulder altogether."

He had taken the girl's outstretched hand in both of his, and now looked into her eyes with a smile of pleased gratitude. Evie smiled back.

"You should never have thought that of me," she said. "You might have known I would come eventually. If uncle hadn't been so furious about it I should have come sooner, but I had to use my discretion and wait. The first time I suggested a visit he flung out of the room in a temper. I fear you have done for yourself, dear, so far as your father is concerned."

St. John looked moody, and seeing his change of countenance, she hastened to turn the subject.

"Jack," she said, "I am awfully low-spirited—I suppose I have missed you rather.

I want you to take me out to tea somewhere and cheer me up if you can."

St. John swallowed the bait. The idea of a diversion was pleasing to him, and the knowledge that he had been missed gratified his vanity.

"Dear little girl, of course I will," he answered. "I'll just go and put it all right with Thompkins, and then I'll be at your service. Jill's in the studio. You saw her though, didn't you?"

Miss Bolton flushed.

"Ye-es," she answered hesitatingly, "for a minute. Make haste, Jack dear; I am so impatient to be off. While you are gone I will look at these abominable photographs. I meant to let you take mine to-day, but I object to being caricatured."

"You must let Jill paint you," he said, "She's first class at portrait painting and would like to get some customers."

"One day," the girl answered vaguely, "perhaps I will."

St. John hurried out, and Miss Bolton turned with languid interest to inspect the portraits round the walls. When her cousin returned he discovered her intently scrutinizing a cabinet photograph of Mr. Markham.

"What a libel," she cried holding it up. "This is your handiwork, I should imagine. When did you take it?"

"Oh! I don't know," he answered carelessly, "Jill took it one day. She has taken him lots of times; he often calls in."

Evie's eyebrows went up with a show of surprise.

"Is he a friend of—Mrs. St. John?" she asked.

"I suppose so; Jill likes him. He and I were always rather chummy, and he drops in in to talk about—oh! well, about old times and—friends, you know."

"He never told me," she rejoined slowly. "I saw him yesterday and he mentioned very casually that he met you recently; he did not say that he was intimate here."

"Perhaps he didn't think that it would interest you," he suggested. "Or he might have thought the subject tabooed."

"With me?" she cried. "Impossible! I am always talking about you."

"Very flattering of you, my dear Evie," he laughingly rejoined, "but you'll never persuade me that you are so one idead."

Miss Bolton put the photograph back in its place, and turned towards the entrance with an evident desire to get away.

"I am," she said. "I've only got one idea at present and that's tea. Don't let us waste more time, Jack, but come along at once."

"It's an awful pity Jill can't come with us," he remarked as he followed her out, "but we couldn't both leave together."

"Yes," acquiesced Evie, none too heartily, "it is a pity. Never mind she sees plenty of you now and I don't. She can't begrudge me a few hours now and then. I am seriously thinking of getting married myself, Jack; it is so deadly dull since you went."

Thinking of Markham, St. John looked pleased.

"Why don't you?" he asked.

"I am going to," she answered settling herself in a corner of the carriage with an airy laugh. "I am looking about for a title."

"Oh!" observed St. John disapprovingly, "I shouldn't bother about that. Why not look about for someone you can give your heart to?"

"Because I haven't got one to bestow," she retorted. "If I ever possessed such an uncomfortable organ it must have been stolen from me long ago, but I don't feel the want of it so don't miss it at all. I suppose you flatter yourself that Jill has given her heart to you?"

"Yes," he answered smiling, and patting his left side, "I have it here safe enough in place of the one I gave to her."

"Ah!" returned Miss Bolton coolly, "a pretty fancy no doubt, but a fancy all the

same, my dear Jack, and absolutely ridiculous."

"Don't be cynical," he said; "it's a sign of the times, and unbecoming."

"And cynical women are generally old maids," laughed Evie. "That won't do for I must have my title. I won't die an old maid if I have to advertise in a matrimonial journal."

## CHAPTER XIV

When St. John returned after seeing his cousin safely home it was late in the afternoon, and though the place still remained open business was apparently over for the day. Thompkins and Co were not over-burdened with customers at any time, and their number since the advent of the new Co. had been steadily on the decrease. Business was slack, the returns were very small, and St. John felt by no means sanguine as to the success of his venture. He had been married a little over four months, and it was only by exercising the greatest care that they managed to pay their way even. Jill was a thrifty housewife—she always had been,—but St. John forgot his straightened circumstances at times, and

launched out a little recklessly. He had not been altogether careful that afternoon, and the consciousness of the fact gave him an unpleasant twinge of remorse as he mounted the steep stairs to their little sitting-room.

Jill was alone standing looking out of the window with her back towards the door, nor did she turn round at his entry. She was displeased.

"You have been a long time," she said.

"I'm afraid I have," he admitted. "You weren't lonely I hope?"

"No; I was too busy for that. And afterwards Mr. Markham came in. He has just left."

"Why, he was here yesterday. He surely didn't want his photo taken again?"

"No, I think he wanted a chat, and when he found I was alone he stayed on for company. Have you had a pleasant time? Where did you go?"

"We went and had tea," he answered.

He didn't say where; he was ashamed to; it was one of the places where you pay for locality and Miss Bolton had not once offered to share expenses. "And then we spent a little time at the Academy—Evie's fond of pictures you know."

"Oh, yes, I know," agreed Jill drily. "I have a vivid recollection of her passion for art; it was so upsetting. I suppose she shut her eyes occasionally? Some people take art like they do physic—shut their eyes and hold their noses except when nobody's looking."

"Jill dear, don't be nasty," he said.

Jill laughed.

"I can't help it," she answered. "I'm afraid my nature must be warped I have such a knack of being disagreeable. I could have pinched that horrid little baby this afternoon, it irritated me so; and yet I am fond of children. And I could have been exceedingly rude to Miss Bolton if she hadn't been rude to me first;—of course I wouldn't follow her example in anything."

"Rude to you?—Evie? How?"

"Oh! in an entirely lady-like manner. She merely gave me to understand that she didn't intend to recognise me, and treated me as she would any other shop assistant. Miss Bolton means taking you up and cutting your wife. I suppose she is perfectly justified."

"Don't be ridiculous, Jill," St. John cried sharply. "Evie means nothing of the sort. She spoke of you most kindly, and said it was a pity you couldn't go with us."

"Ah!" rejoined Jill queerly. "My mistake again. Evie has a mystifying way of showing her kindness, but doubtless she means well. You, I suppose, understand her better than I do, but I shouldn't advise you to try arranging an excursion for three."

"Very well," he returned, "I won't go with her again. I wouldn't have to-day if I had thought it would annoy you. We were like brother and sister always and it was pleasant for me to see her again."

Jill heaved a deep sigh, and leaned her forehead against the window pane. She knew that he had no intention of wounding her feelings yet these unconscious allusions to the sacrifice that he had made in marrying her hurt her more than they need have done. And St. John never guessed. Not for a moment had he regretted the step he had taken, and it did not occur to him that Jill should imagine he might.

"I am not annoyed," she said after a brief pause. "I am irritable this evening, that's all. Mr. Markham said that I wasn't looking well; perhaps I am a little out of sorts. Are the pictures good this year, Jack?"

"Good enough. But none of them to come up to yours in my eyes as I told Evie. It's scandalous to think that real talent should get overlooked, yet it's often enough the case."

"Mr. Markham," jerked out Jill suddenly, "wishes me to paint his portrait."

St. John laughed.

"Markham is getting vain," he said. "No doubt he purposes presenting it to Evie. When is the first sitting to be?"

"I don't know, nothing is definitely settled, I thought I would speak to you about it first."

St. John looked at her in astonishment.

"Why?" he asked.

Jill hesitated. She had no real reason to offer, but when Mr. Markham made the proposal she felt that she would like to consult Jack before deciding. She had consulted him, and now regretted having done so.

"I wasn't sure whether the arrangement would be agreeable to Mr. Thompkins," she answered. "He expects me to be available for the studio at all times and seasons you know, and, of course, undertaking this would mean giving a good deal of my time—"

"To hear you one would think," interposed her husband, "that you contemplated painting a multitude. You know as well as I do that

Thompkins will be quite agreeable. I should have thought you would have settled the matter out of hand."

"I am not at all sure that I will undertake it," retorted Jill pettishly. "I hate painting men; they make such horribly uninteresting subjects; and I'm sick to death of the sound of Evie Bolton's name. Fancy listening for a solid hour to the extolling of her virtues! I don't think I could stand it."

"Oh! that's it, is it?" laughed St. John. "Well, of course, you must please yourself, old girl, but I shouldn't let Evie do me out of a fiver if I were you. Besides I have thought lately that Markham avoids the subject. I suppose he twigs that you're not so fond of it as he is."

Jill said nothing. She had noticed the same thing; and could not help wondering why their visitor came so frequently when he no longer cared to discuss the once all sufficing topic. Jack had formerly declared that he only came to talk Evie, but that

could hardly be said of him now. Sometimes Mrs. Jack fancied that his suit did not progress altogether as he could have wished, and in her womanly, whole-hearted way felt sorry for him. She had been so happy in her own love that she would have pitied anyone less fortunate than herself. Besides she liked Markham and admired his perseverance, though she wondered occasionally whether he would have been quite so devoted had Miss Bolton been penniless like herself.

"I saw the Governor on my way home," observed St. John at length, breaking the silence with a short laugh. Mrs. St John's heart gave a sudden jump.

"He didn't—cut you?" she queried.

"Oh, dear no! bowed to me almost as though he considered me on an equality. Feels jolly rum being treated by one's father like that."

"I call it abominable of him," Jill cried hotly. "He seems absolutely heartless."

St. John looked amused.

"Well, I don't quite see what else he could have done under the circumstances," said he. "I don't blame him for giving me the kick out and all that as I disappointed him, but I do for not bringing me up to some profession; it's beastly rough luck for me."

Jill laid one small hand upon his shoulder, ever so light a touch but it carried great comfort with it.

"You don't make a good poor man, dear," she said gently. "You should have known my father; he was always cheerful even in his poorest moments; yet no one would have called him careless nor improvident. He was simply brave and self-reliant."

"Little mentor," answered her husband gravely, drawing her face down to his. "I accept the rebuke; there shall be no more complaints. I will be 'up and doing—learn to labour and to wait.'"

## CHAPTER XV

NOTWITHSTANDING her former reluctance Jill eventually undertook the commission for Mr. Markham's portrait, though some time elapsed before she started on the work, Markham, himself, being out of town staying as a guest at a house where Evie Bolton was also visiting, a circumstance that filled St. John with pleasurable anticipation, though Jill, less sanguine as to the result, was more inclined to foresee troubles ahead, and looked forward with no great joy to their friend's return. Yet his manner, when he did put in an appearance, conveyed absolutely no impression; as St. John afterwards informed his wife he believed that Markham had funked it.

"When shall we have the first sitting, Mrs. St. John?" he exclaimed after the

usual greetings were over. "I am quite anxious to begin."

"Why not fix Monday?" suggested St. John amicably.

"Monday!" cried Jill. "It's washing day. How can you be so inconsiderate?"

"Oh, ah! washing day! I forgot. The atmosphere is composed of soap-suds, and we have cold meat. Not Monday, my dear boy; it is the most ungodly day of the week."

"Tuesday would do," said Jill, "if that suits, and I think three o'clock would be the most convenient hour for me. The light, of course, is best in the mornings, but I am always busy then."

"Any time will suit me," Markham answered promptly, "and any day."

"Ah," said Jill with a little smile, "Jack was like that once. Why don't you get something to do?"

"Because it isn't necessary."

"But independence is such a grand thing," she persisted.

"Exactly. I inherited it, and I like it best that way."

Jill laughed.

"We can't all be workers, I suppose," she said, "yet I fancy if I had been given my choice I should have chosen that kind of independence. Work is necessary to me."

"From a selfish point of view I am glad that it is; otherwise you wouldn't paint portraits."

"What makes you fancy that?" she asked.

"No one who paints as you do would undertake portraits if they could avoid it. I know a man who has always one canvas at least in the academy, but he can't afford to paint pictures now; they don't sell; so he does portraits."

Jill sighed.

"I am sorry for that man," she said, "his life must be a disappointment. The people who want to be painted are generally so impossible."

"My dear girl," remonstrated St. John,

"considering the circumstances that is one of the things better left unsaid."

"I am speaking from the artistic sense," she replied; "besides I said 'generally.'"

"I quite understand," interposed Markham laughing, "and entirely agree with you. But that won't interfere with the sitting on Tuesday, eh?"

"I hope not," she answered gravely; "I should be doubly sorry now if you didn't come."

"There is no fear of that," he said. "I enjoy seeing myself reproduced. It is so often an improvement, you know, yet one invariably flatters oneself that it is as one habitually looks."

"We haven't done much to foster your conceit so far," she observed.

"Oh! I don't know," he answered." "I really thought that that last portrait was a bit like me. Somebody told me I did look like that sometimes when I had a liver attack."

"Evie said it was a libel," St. John remarked tentatively.

"Ah! Well, I should be sorry to contradict her," he replied, and Jill fancied, though she could not be quite sure, that he looked slightly displeased at the mention of Miss Bolton's name. Why should a name that had once been his sole subject of conversation excite his annoyance now? It was not consistent. Had it been a case of unrequited affection she could have understood his being hurt, but displeasure was something she could not account for; it irritated her, why she could not have explained. She was not accustomed to analyse her sensations even to herself; it would have been wiser if she had; for her instinct was wonderfully true, and her nature peculiarly observant.

"You put me on my mettle," she said, smiling. "It shan't be a libel this time I promise you if infinite pains can prevent."

"I am not afraid to trust myself in your hands," he said.

Jill laughed.

"That's very fulsome flattery," she

answered. "I was responsible for the libel, remember. Mr. Thompkins declares that I shall ruin the firm yet. It is so humiliating because I was so positive at first that I was going to become one of those celebrated lady photographers who have all the best people sitting to them, and can charge any price they like."

"It's just as well as it is, perhaps," St. John rejoined with conviction. "Success would make you a horrid little prig, Jill; very few people can stand it."

"If Mr. Markham were not here," Jill returned, "I would tell you what I think of you.'

## CHAPTER XVI

JILL had got her canvas and everything in readiness, and was waiting for her model. She had been waiting for about ten minutes, and was growing slightly impatient; she hated wasting her time. St. John was busy in the studio, unusually busy, so that he could not possibly get away even for a few minutes. He wanted her badly, she knew; he always wanted a mate, and she felt rather as if she were shirking. She looked at the canvas in a dissatisfied kind of way, and then out of the window at the people in the street.

"I believe," she mused, thinking of the absent Markham, "that I could draw his face from memory."

Fetching a piece of paper she seated her-

self at the table and made a rough sketch in pencil as she had once done of St. John, only in St. John's case she had not trusted to memory. Markham arrived while she was thus employed, and he stood by the table watching her, as she put in the finishing strokes. He smiled while he watched as though he were amused. Jill was grave and very much absorbed.

"What a wonderful little head it is," he said.

"Do you think so?" she asked, lifting the head he alluded to the better to regard the one on paper which he was not even looking at. "I don't call it wonderful, but I had an idea that I could catch the likeness; some faces are quite easily remembered."

"Yes," he acquiesced, "yours is."

"Mine? I don't agree with you; my features are too indescribable. There. It's finished. I have caught the expression, haven't I But I haven't done justice to the nose. Will you sit in this chair near the window, please?

you are dreadfully late, so we musn't waste further time."

Jill worked rapidly, and there could not possibly be any question as to her ability. Markham watched her with interest, and every now and again he rose from his seat to have a look how the work progressed, notwithstanding her protest that it spoilt the pose.

"I can't help that," he declared, "it fascinates me, I must look."

"I had no idea before that you were so vain," she said.

"I'm not," he answered. "It isn't the subject that interests me but the work. I could stand behind you and watch you all day."

"Not having eyes at the back of my head I shouldn't make much progress with the portrait in that case," she retorted. "Do you mind going back to your seat, please, and allowing me to study your physiognomy again?"

He obeyed reluctantly, and for a time the work continued in silence; Jill was too engrossed to talk, and Markham apparently had no desire to. He sat quite motionless watching her with a strained, intent, unfathomable expression in his glance that Jill in unconscious accuracy was transmitting to the painted eyes on the canvas, though the expression was by no means habitual to him, and gave the portrait an unlifelike appearance. She shook her head over it despondently, and stood back from the easel in order to take a better look.

"I must leave the eyes alone to-day," she said, "I am making a muddle of them. They are your eyes, and yet they are not yours. I don't understand it."

"Oh, bother the portrait," he exclaimed. "Put it up for to-day and let's talk."

"It wouldn't get finished very quickly at that rate," she answered.

"I don't want it finished quickly," he said.

"No?" Jill's tone was expressive of sur-

prise, and she looked at him very straightly as she spoke. "What are you going to do with it when it *is* finished?" she asked.

"Give it to you if you will accept it."

"Don't be ridiculous! that's not what you had it painted for."

"Now, how do you know that?" he enquired. He had risen, and coming forward took the palette and paint brushes out of her hand; then, receiving no remonstrance, he began to untie the strings of her painting apron.

"Shut up shop for to-day," he pleaded. "I am going to stay to tea."

It was rather an unfortunate moment for St. John to choose for putting in an appearance. Had he been married as many years as he had months it would not have mattered, but under existing circumstances it was regrettable that he should open the door when he did. Jill, all unconscious of the suspicious proximity of Mr. Markham's arm to her shoulder, smiled serenely as she en-

countered St. John's sharp, surprised glance, and noting that he looked displeased, presumed that he had spent a wearisome afternoon in the studio.

"Leisurable at last?" she queried cheerfully. "I am so glad, dear. Come and make yourself agreeable while I see about the kettle; Mr. Markham is going to stay to tea."

"Sorry, but I can't," he answered shortly. "I have to be in the dark room in a few minutes, and have enough developing to keep me engaged for some time. How's the sitting getting on? You don't appear to be very busy. Is Markham tired already?"

"We've been at it a solid three quarters of an hour," rejoined Markham aggrieved, "and as for not being busy, look at the canvas, man."

St. John did look; he stood a little way off, and studied it earnestly for several minutes, but he did not speak.

"Well, what do you think of it?" enquired the other.

"I never presume to criticise Jill's work until it is finished," he answered. "At present I don't like it."

"Neither do I," acquiesced Jill, "that's why I was not loth to give up for to-day. It's the eyes, I think; they have a sinister expression that makes him look like a stage villain. And yet I'm sure the expression was there at the time."

"I hope not," St. John rejoined, looking fixedly at his friend in a rather disconcerting manner; "the eyes never lie, you know."

Jill took the canvas down from the easel and leaned it with its face hidden against the wall.

"Don't utter uncomfortable platitudes," she remarked. "If you can't be more cheerful I hope you'll retire to your dark room speedily; Mr. Markham and I were enjoying ourselves till you came."

To her surprise he took her literally, and, muttering something about 'sorry to be a wet blanket,' wheeled about abruptly and left the

room. Jill looked at Markham, and her eyes were both angry and concerned.

"I can't think what's the matter with Jack," she said half apologetically; "he is not often such a bear. Do you know that I think you had almost better not stay this evening. It wouldn't be very hilarious if he were in that mood, would it?"

"Of course I won't stay; I was only joking. Jack is a bit huffed about something no doubt, but you'll soon coax him into a better temper," he responded, "I'll come to-morrow for another sitting, shall I?"

"No," Jill answered slowly; "the same day and hour next week, if you please."

On the following Tuesday when Markham turned up for the arranged sitting he found Jill alone as on the former occasion, St. John having purposely gone out to spend the afternoon with Evie Bolton. The latter had written to him during the past week asking him if he could manage to meet her somewhere as she had something of importance to

impart to him, and St. John, in his fit of suddenly awakened jealousy had settled on the day that Jill had fixed upon for the second sitting, taking a very malicious satisfaction in her evident annoyance when he stated his intention. She said little enough at the time, but her manner betrayed her vexation, and the strained relationship that had existed between them during the past few days grew more apparent. When Markham arrived, she was feeling more hurt than angry, and her mood was softened and subdued, and nearer akin to tears than it had been since her marriage.

"Jack has gone out," she said in answer to his enquiry, not so much explanatorily, but because she felt she must say something, and that was the only thing she could think of at the moment. It was the one miserable refrain that kept repeating itself in her mind —'Jack has gone out—back to his own people.'

"He won't be home till late," she went on

apathetically. "He said he was going to take a journey into the past, and forget the sordid present for a time. I don't think it altogether wise of him, do you? Where is the use in looking back when the sordid present has to be lived through, and the uncertain future to be faced?"

"Mrs. St. John," Markham answered gravely. "St. John—*our* St. John was never wise; the only noteworthy action of his life was when he married you."

"Ah!" said Jill with a very pathetic smile, "I often fancy that that was the most unwise thing he ever did."

Markham looked at her speculatively, and failed to make an immediate reply. Was it St. John, himself, who had given her cause to think so, he wondered. Was she finding out so soon that their marriage had been a mistake?

"You are depressed," he said, leaning towards her, his hands lightly grasping the arms of his chair. "It isn't good for you to feel like that. Jack is a brute to leave you

to yourself. What can I do to cheer you up, I wonder? After all we are both in the same boat; for if you are lonely, so am I."

"*You!*" echoed Jill in a tone which implied that her listener did not know what loneliness meant. "How can you talk of loneliness? At least you have Evie—"

"No," he interrupted shortly; "Evie is nothing to me, and less than nothing. She is engaged to marry a marquis. I should have thought you would have heard of that by now."

At his words, Jill's face visibly brightened. It flashed upon her with a certain amount of conviction that this was why her husband had gone to his cousin; possibly she had sent for him to consult him on the subject, and the trouble that had oppressed her lightened instantly with the thought. How could she have doubted him even for a moment? But he ought to have taken her into his confidence; it was a mistake to make a secret of so simple a thing.

Markham misinterpreted the sudden brightening of her countenance, and when in her impulsive, sympathetic way she laid her small fingers compassionately over his, he grasped the little hand feverishly between both his eager palms, and held it against his breast while he drew her nearer to him and stared into her face with burning, compelling eyes. She thought his manner strange but pardonable under the circumstances.

"I am so sorry," she said gently, "so very sorry."

"Sorry for what?" he asked.

"Oh, the—the—your disappointment," she rejoined with an awkward deepening of the colour in her cheeks. She felt that she was getting on to delicate ground, and did not know very well how to proceed; but he relieved the situation by a short, impatient laugh.

"There wasn't any disappointment," he returned. "You must have known that I was off that long ago. Don't humbug, Jill;

you must have perceived that ever since I knew you I have cared for no one else. I should not have mentioned it only I see now that you care a little also—that your marriage is not altogether a success. You are lonely as well as I, dear. Why not let us console one another?"

## CHAPTER XVII

For a few seconds Jill sat mute, too thoroughly taken by surprise even to move. No lurking suspicion had ever entered her pure, wholesome, unspoilt mind that any man could so insult a decent woman. Even then it struck her that in some way she must have unconsciously given him an opening. How else would he have dared to make love to her, and to seem so assured that his love would be returned?

She drew herself away from him, not violently, but with a cold displeasure that carried more weight than any fierce resentment could have done, and in a voice that trembled slightly with repressed anger exclaimed as she rose and faced him,

"Mr. Markham, you have insulted me past

forgiveness. If any action or word of mine has led you to speak as you have done I deplore it with my whole heart—I couldn't feel more humiliated even if such were the case; I feel so abjectly debased as it is. How dare you imply that I do not get on with my husband? I love him with the whole force of my being. I doubt if you could understand or appreciate such love as ours."

"I doubt it too," he sneered. "My love is not of the kind that can so readily efface itself. You are rather unreasonable, I think; a man can't help his feelings. Some women would take it as a compliment."

"I am sorry for the sort of women you seem acquainted with," she answered rather sadly. "You have formed a very low opinion of the sex. It is not a compliment that you have paid me, and you know it. Don't say anything more please; I decline to discuss that, or any other subject with you. I must request you to leave my rooms, and never to enter them again. You have made further

intercourse an impossibility, and our past friendship something to be remembered only with regret."

"Don't say that," he began pleadingly; but Jill cut him short.

"Please understand that I am quite in earnest," she said. "When Jack comes home I shall explain to him what has happened; it is well that he should understand the true character of his friend. I can never thank heaven sufficiently that my husband is both a man of honour, and a gentleman."

"For that matter so should I have been if I had met you first," he answered gloomily. "You are rather hard on me, Jill. Perhaps I have been too precipitate; but I love you so madly, and to-day you seemed so sad, and sweet, and lonely, that I wanted to comfort you."

"Enough!" exclaimed Jill excitedly. "If you don't go I shall ask Mr. Thompkins to come and protect me from further indignity. How contemptible you are!—how mean! Why don't you insult me when my husband

is at home? The sight of you is hateful to me. Why won't you go?"

"I will," he answered quietly, "as you wish it. I do not want to frighten you; but remember—always remember that I love you with all my heart."

"Jill stood quite still and watched him as he gravely quitted her presence, and then listened dully to his footsteps clattering down the stairs. When they died away along the narrow passage and she heard the street door bang behind him she put her hand to her forehead in a dazed kind of way, and glanced vaguely round the little room seeing nothing but Markham's cynical face with the ugly expression in his eyes that was in the painted eyes of the canvas on the easel. Her glance travelled to the portrait, and rested there for a moment. The sight of it seemed to rouse her into action, and, with a catch in her voice that sounded like an angry sob, she took up a brush, and in a few vigorous strokes painted the whole thing out again as she would have liked to blot the incident from her memory.

To Jill the fact that Markham loved her was anything but a congratulatory matter. The red blood surged to her temples in a flood of indignant colour at the mere thought of such an outrage to her wifehood. She was very angry; her calmness and self-possession had entirely deserted her leaving her excited and wholly unlike herself. She did not expect St. John home for some time; he had told her not to wait tea, he should be late; and so she seated herself in the big chair by the window to watch for his return, too upset to think of getting tea for herself, too miserable to feel the need of it. St. John was not very late however. He had promised Thompkins to be back by six, and at a few minutes to the hour he arrived. Jill saw him coming but she did not move. She remained where she was until she heard his footstep on the stairs, then she rose and walking quickly to the door threw it open. He was going into the bedroom to change his coat for the old one he did his work in. Jill called to him softly,

but he went on as though he had not heard. She set her lips tightly and followed him, determined to clear up the misunderstanding that existed between them at any cost, and to tell him what had occurred during the afternoon.

"Jack," she said, "I want to talk to you."

"Sorry," he answered, "but I haven't time. I have a lot of work to do."

His manner was anything but encouraging. At another time she would have turned away and allowed the breach to widen, but to-day she was sick of quarrelling about nothing, and longed for a complete reconciliation, and so she persevered.

"You are not very kind to me, dear," she said. "I think the work can wait a few minutes longer, and what I have to say is most important. I have had a very unpleasant experience to-day, Jack, and feel quite worried and upset about it—if you only knew how worried I am sure you would give me your attention."

St. John turned towards her, an expression of surprise on his face. He was in his shirt sleeves, and looked handsome, bad-tempered and ill at ease, his afternoon with Evie had apparently not conduced to exhilaration of spirits.

"What on earth can be worrying you?" he exclaimed. "Didn't Markham turn up?"

"Yes, he turned up," answered Jill sharply. "That is the trouble. I had to send him away again. You, who knew him so intimately, had no right to leave me alone with such a man—no right to introduce me to him at all. He insulted me—he actually tried to make *love* to me."

She broke off abruptly. Her voice shook a little, and she put up a hand to her burning face. St. John swore. He dropped the jacket he was holding on to the floor, and began struggling fiercely into his outdoor coat again. Jill watched him anxiously. Then she laid a restraining hand upon his arm.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Find him and—give him a lesson."

He looked so fierce and determined that Jill felt frightened. She was nervous and unstrung with the excitement of the afternoon, and she trembled slightly as she clung tenaciously to his arm.

"Let him alone," she cried quickly. "I will not have my name dragged into any dispute. We have done with him; that is enough. The matter must end there."

"That is all very well," he retorted," but do you suppose I am going to stand quietly by and allow any cad to make love to my wife?"

"If you had not stood quietly by it might never have happened," she answered. "I don't quite know what it is we have been quarrelling about, but I do know that lately we have drifted apart, and he noticed it—he said so. He thought that I had found out that our marriage had been a mistake."

She looked up to meet St. John's gaze

riveted upon her face, with an expression in his eyes that puzzled her, it was so unlike anything she had seen in them before. He looked as a man might look when someone he has loved and trusted deals him a blow on the face, so stern and white and miserable, and so full of an unspeakable shame.

"Jack," she half-whispered, "what is it? What is the matter, dear?

"Forgive me," he cried brokenly, "If I have misjudged you; but I thought—as Markham thinks. And, my God, I think so still."

Jill drew away from him, wounded into silence by what she heard. For a few moments she stood irresolute, struck motionless with an anguish too deep for words; then with a half articulate cry she tottered forward, and fell, a forlorn little bundle, at his feet. St. John stooped swiftly, and gathering her up, laid her tenderly upon the bed, and, bending over her with a face even whiter than her own, stared down, awed and

humbled, at the motionless, unconscious form.

He was almost too stunned at first to realize that there was anything serious the matter; but it gradually dawned upon him that she ought not to be allowed to lie there as she was without calling in some assistance, and so, not pausing to put on his coat, he ran out of the bedroom on to the landing, and stood there in his shirt sleeves, in terrified and breathless anxiety.

"Thompkins!" he cried excitedly. "Thompkins!"

"Hallo!" answered a voice from the bottom of the stairs, a voice of calm and unruffled serenity.

"For God's sake run for the doctor," St. John called back.

There was silence for a few seconds; then the street door was opened and banged to again, and St. John returned to the room to watch by his wife and wait.

## CHAPTER XVIII

It was not many weeks after her sudden and unusual attack of unconsciousness that Jill presented her husband with a little son. The small stranger appeared upon the scene rather too soon, and was delicate and puny in consequence, and a great source of anxiety to its parents. Jill, herself, was very ill for a long while after its birth, so that St. John had a trying and expensive time of it, the only beneficial result being that every minor worry was forgotten in the all absorbing one of his wife's health.

After the child's birth he wrote a brief note to his father acquainting him with the news. He considered it his duty to do so, though he neither expected nor hoped for any reply to the letter; and he was not disappointed; Mr.

St. John, Sr., might never have received it for all the sign he made, and Jill, being ill and low-spirited at the time, cried with annoyance to think that her husband should have written to him at all.

"He will only imagine that you want something out of him," she exclaimed pettishly.

"Never mind what he imagines," answered St. John, bending over the speaker's couch, and touching the baby's smooth cheek with his finger. "It needn't bother us so long as we are satisfied that we have done what is right. You wouldn't like to think that one day this little man might fail in his duty to *his* father, would you?"

Jill looked down at the wee, mottled face, and laughed softly, though the tears stood in her eyes still, and would not be blinked away.

"How absurd it seems," she said, "to think that this will one day be a man. It's so small and frail that I'm half afraid of it, Jack. And it's dreadfully ugly too, isn't it, dear? Not even you could call it pretty."

"Never mind it's looks," St. John answered reassuringly. "They're all putty-faced at first, you know. If he only grows up with but half his mother's charm and goodness he'll do all right."

Jill laughed again; the extravagance of the compliment amused her.

"I hope he won't grow up with his mother's temper," she said, adding with a mischievous look at St. John, "nor his father's either for that matter; I'd like him to strike out an original line there, Jack."

"Too late, I'm afraid," St. John answered ruefully as the baby screwed up its face preparatory to howling. "He always yells for nothing just when we're having a quiet chat."

Jill sat up a little and rocked the child gently in her arms.

"He is jealous," she explained; "he takes after you in that."

"I think the less *you* say about it the better," he retorted. "I remember some

rather uncomfortable half hours spent on Evie's account."

She smiled, her face close pressed to the baby's, her lips caressing it's hair.

"How ridiculous it all seems now!" she exclaimed—"How small! What a pair of geese we were!"

"Yes," he said, and he straightened himself and walked away to the window to hide the mortification in his eyes. His jealousy had been of a far graver nature than hers, and he did not like to hear it referred to even. He was very much ashamed of himself, and rather embarrassed by a generosity that forgave so quickly and entirely as Jill had done.

"Yes," he repeated softly more to himself than her, "we were a pair of geese. How I wish we had found it out sooner than we did. What an infinitude of suffering it might have saved us both!"

The next important event in their lives, which took place as soon as Jill was well enough to walk to Church, was the baby's

christening. He was called John after his father as the eldest sons of the St. John's had been from time immemorial. It was Jill's wish that this should be, St. John, himself, having no idea on the subject. It was also Jill's wish that Mr. Thompkins should stand Godfather, and, upon being asked, the senior partner gave a somewhat reluctant consent. He was a practical, hard-working old bachelor, and babies were not much in his line, but he had an unbounded admiration and respect for this baby's mother, so when she informed him of her desire very much after the manner of one conferring an inestimable favour he had not the pluck nor the cruelty to say her nay. The honour cost him a guinea in the shape of a christening present, but the guinea weighed lightly in the balance compared with the interest that he was expected to take in his Godson. Jill had a way of putting it in his arms, and watching him nurse it which not only embarrassed but annoyed him greatly ; and sometimes St. John

would come in and look on with a grin, observing the while that he was quite a family man, or something equally idiotic.

St. John *was* idiotic in those days. He thought so much of his ugly offspring, as the infant's Godfather mentally called it, and spoilt as many plates in attempting to photograph it as would have served for all the babies that came to the studio in a year. Mr. Thompkins groaned, but Jill laughed happily; this tiny link between herself and Jack seemed the one thing necessary to make her life perfect. Its advent had closed a chapter in their history and commenced a new one altogether brighter and happier than the last. The last had known Evie Bolton, and Markham; but now the name of the one was seldom mentioned, the other never. Jill had not seen Markham from the hour she sent him from her presence—neither had St. John—but a few days after the affair she had received a letter from him, just a short note of apology which ran as follows :—

"Dear Mrs. St. John,

"I cannot, I fear, convey to you my heart-felt sorrow at the indiscretion I was guilty of last Tuesday. I have been reproaching myself for my folly ever since. The fault was mine, as is also the loss. I made a mistake. Try to forgive me and to forget. I go abroad next week indefinitely. Good-bye."

Jill offered it to her husband when she had finished reading, but St. John put her hand aside, and shook his head decisively.

"You know that that isn't necessary between you and me," he said reproachfully.

"I think he would like you to see it," she answered.

He took it then and read it through; when he had done so he handed it back again with a grave half-troubled smile.

"Considering how I, myself, was mistaken," he said, "I don't think that I have the right to censure him at all."

Jill tore the note up slowly, watching the fragments intently as they fluttered from her fingers. The knowledge that her husband

had misjudged her was the bitterest part of all. And yet in her heart she did not blame him; she even found excuses for him, but the pain was none the less acute because she refused to admit its reason, though no doubt it was easier borne, and would be more readily forgotten.

"I am very much afraid," she said gently, with a slight hesitation of tone and manner, "that I, also, must have been at fault to cause two men to make the same mistake. I don't suppose that I have any right to blame him either. I think the wisest course would be to do as he suggests—forgive everything, and forget."

And as St. John was of the same opinion the matter ended there, and if not entirely forgotten was at least never referred to between them again.

## CHAPTER XIX

It was just two years after Jill's baby had been born that a very wonderful thing occurred; Mr. St. John sen. visited Thompkins and Co. for no less a purpose than calling upon his son's wife. He did not come unexpectedly; he wrote a week beforehand apprising them of the fact, and duly on the appointed date he pushed open the outer door and entered the mean little shop, standing in it, as it were, protestingly, his hat off, his shoulders slightly bowed; tall, and cross, and dignified—frowning at his son. St. John came forward quickly. He was expecting his father but pride forbade his making any preparation. He had been in the studio during the early part of the afternoon and was still in his working clothes though Jill

had suggested to him the propriety of changing, but he had chosen to ignore the suggestion, arguing that that which was good enough for his wife should be good enough for his father too; and so he came forward as he was and stood in front of the visitor just as he might have done had he been any ordinary customer. The old man's glance travelled slowly from the strong face with its proud smile to the shabby suit of clothes, the stains upon them testifying to the nature of the wearer's work, and his carelessness as an operator. As he looked he smiled also. It was not a pleasant smile, and the younger man silently resented it.

"Photography does not appear a very lucrative employment," he observed.

"No," answered St. John. "At least I do not find it so."

"Ah! Well, no doubt that assists you to realize the mistake you made."

"I made no mistake," the other interrupted shortly. "If you refer to my marriage that

is the one thing I have never—and shall never regret."

"Yet it has been the means of reducing you to your present strait."

"Pardon me," retorted the younger man, "want of a profession, and not my marriage, has been the means of my poverty. If I failed in my duty to you as a son remember that you in the first place failed in your duty to me."

The grey brows drew together over the high-bridged nose, and the old eyes glared angrily into the young, indignant ones.

"I brought you up to the profession of a gentleman," Mr. St. John remarked.

"If by the 'profession of a gentleman' you mean a dependent beggar—a parasite—a less than menial," rejoined the son, "you did. And until I met Jill I was not man enough to feel the degradation of it."

"Until you met Jill you were not a fool," snapped his father.

"We won't discuss that point further," St.

John rejoined; "it is one on which we are never likely to agree. You wanted, your note said, to see Jill. I can't imagine why, but if you still wish to see her we will go upstairs at once."

Mr. St. John having intimated that a two minutes' uncomfortable conversation with his son had not altered his intention in coming, the latter turned impatiently upon his heel and led the way to the sitting-room where Jill was waiting with her little boy, striving, in her efforts to amuse him, to stifle her own nervousness and vague misgivings.

The child was simply and daintily dressed in white, and had grown from a puny infant into a sturdy, healthy little man, with more than an ordinary share of good looks and good spirits, and a very charming and lovable disposition. Jill idolized him, but she was wise in her love, and the spoiling—if spoiling it could be called—was of a very judicious kind, tending chiefly to bring out the best qualities in the impressionable baby-nature,

so that surrounded, as this baby was, with love and care and tenderness, he bade fair to turn out a generous, affectionate, happy little fellow; and if he were not as well off as some babies, at least he had been born without the silver spoon, and so was not likely to feel the deprivation.

Jill had been playing with him on the floor, doing her best to keep him good-tempered before his grandfather's arrival; for with her mother-instinct she associated this visit with the child, and was naturally anxious that he should appear at his best. When she heard their steps upon the stairs she scrambled hastily to a more dignified position, and stood with bright eyes, and flushed cheeks waiting to receive her former enemy. She had not forgotten his first and only other visit to her; she was not likely to forget it, nor to forgive him the pain he made her suffer then, and the insult which he had offered her. But she was content to ignore the past for her husband's sake more than

her own, and equally ready to treat her father-in-law with a politeness and consideration that he had no right to expect at her hands. Doubtless he remembered the incident also; he certainly did not anticipate a welcome, for he returned her cool little bow with equal distance—indeed hardly appeared to notice her at all. It was evident that if she had not forgiven him neither had he forgiven her; to her he owed the upsetting of all his plans, and his present lonely, childless condition, and he was not the sort of man who easily forgot an injury, nor readily pardoned the offender. His supercilious gaze rested for an instant on the mother's face, and then wandered away to the child's, taking in every detail of the baby-features from the wide, curious eyes, so absurdly like Jill's both in expression and colouring, to the pretty curved lips, and rounded chin which even then gave promise of being as square and obstinate as his father's. What he saw apparently pleased him; his features relaxed a little, Jill

even fancied that he smiled back when the child in his friendly, confiding fashion smiled up at him, though if such were the case, which was doubtful, he made no further advance. He had never cared for children, and he did not now pretend to feel any interest in this one more than another. He had not come to see his grandson, but merely to make a proposal concerning him, and this proposal he forthwith expounded to the baby's parents to their no small astonishment and dismay. His offer—and it was a good one from a worldly point of view—was to adopt the child altogether; to take him at the age of seven from his present surroundings and bring him up as he had brought up the father, bequeathing, at his death, his entire fortune to him unconditionally. He made no stipulation against the child seeing his parents as often as the latter wished, but he was not to live with them, nor to stay beneath their roof for any length of time.

When he had finished speaking he looked

towards his son, but St. John shook his head decisively, and turned abruptly away; he could not answer such a question; he felt that he had not the right to do so.

"Ask his mother," was all he said.

"Petticoat government, eh?" sneered the old man. "I appealed to you because I hoped that you would have profited by your own experience and been glad of the opportunity of giving your son a chance. With women it is different; they are so beastly selfish in their love; they always want the object of their affection near them."

"Ask his mother," St. John repeated in a hard voice. "A mother has more right than anyone else to decide the future of her child."

Jill, who had remained till now impassive, listening open-eyed to all she heard, came forward as her husband finished speaking and stood between the old man and the baby on the floor as though she would protect the child from his grandfather's designs. She

was quite calm and collected; St. John wondered rather at her evident self-control.

"It is very good of you, Mr. St. John," she said, "to make Baby such a handsome offer. But you are wrong in thinking that a mother's love is selfish; it is not where it is real; and it is entirely in my baby's interests that I am going to regard your proposal."

"Going to refuse it you mean," he snapped.

Jill smiled.

"Going to refuse it if you like to put it that way," she said. "Of course it would be splendid for Baby in one sense, but I don't think it would be kind. I have never approved of bringing children up in a different position to their parents. My boy, no matter how good-hearted he turned out, would grow to look down upon his father, and the poor little shop with its poorer photographs, and upon the kind old man who stood Godfather to him, and drops his

h's, but loves the child almost as though he were his own. I have heard of such things before. Children who are exalted to very different positions to their parents learn to despise them, and feel ashamed of them, and then, of course, they despise themselves for doing so; and altogether it is very hopeless, and rather cruel, I think.

"Don't fancy me ungrateful; it is not that. It isn't that I wouldn't spare my boy if I considered it all for the best; but I don't. I think he will be a much happier, and a better little boy if he is brought up just as well as we can manage, with no more brilliant prospect than the knowledge that he has to make his own way in the world as his father did before him."

"So you are going to make an independent beggar of him as you did of his father, eh? Well, I would have made him an independent gentleman. But no matter. You possess the right unfortunately of ruining both their futures. Perhaps one day

you will remember my offer with regret, but understand please, that I shall not renew it; neither will you or yours benefit from me in any way."

"I had never expected that we should," Jill answered with proud simplicity. "I have not been accustomed to luxury and so don't feel the need of it. It is harder for my husband than for me, harder for him than it will be for the boy; but I don't fancy that Jack minds it much."

"Jack is a fool," his father answered bitterly; "he could have been anything almost if he had followed out my wishes."

St John smiled faintly. He did not resent the slighting epithet applied to himself; he understood in a way, the old man's keen disappointment, and felt more sorry than chagrined at his unrelenting harshness.

"Don't think too much about it, sir," he said; "I should have been bound to fail you somehow. I was never one of those brainy ambitious fellows, you know; it

takes more than money to make a great career."

"It takes a *man*," Mr. St. John answered sententiously. He had not sat down throughout the brief interview, although his son had placed a chair for him, and now he turned to go with less ceremony than when he entered. He even omitted the courtesy of bowing to Jill; he simply walked out without looking at her. St. John followed him and opened the shop door for him to pass through.

"Good-bye," he said earnestly. "I regret the breach between us with all my heart—though that will hardly bridge it over, will it? If at any time you want me you have only to command."

"You have always obeyed my commands so readily, eh?" retorted his father. "I am not likely to trouble you again. By the way you need not consider it necessary in future to make a kind of family Bible of me for the chronicling of domestic events. Our

intercourse is at an end from this date. I neither wish to hear of, nor to see you again."

## CHAPTER XX

WHEN St John had closed the door after his father he walked into the studio and busied himself unnecessarily shifting backscenes and rearranging everything in order to work off the depression the recent interview had left behind. He thoroughly understood that this was the final break with his father, and the realization cost him more than one pang of bitter regret. He felt that to a certain extent he had been wanting in duty, and yet he knew that he could not have acted otherwise; the whole thing was as deplorable as it was inevitable; and it might have been so different had it not been for the obstinate pride of one ambitious old man.

In the midst of his sad reflections he forgot Jill altogether. Sorrow inclines one to be

selfish, and St. John just then was dwelling so much upon his own wounded feelings that he had no room for any other thought. That Jill, too, might be hurt, and that very possibly she was worrying on his account did not occur to him or he would have gone to her at once, instead he seated himself on a little rustic bench that had so often served to pose a difficult subject, and leaned his head dejectedly upon his open palm. And thus Jill found him later when, having left her baby in his Godfather's charge, she came in search of him wondering at his continued absence. The sight brought the tears to her eyes, and she drew back with the half-formed resolve of going away unseen, but changing her mind almost immediately she dropped the shabby curtain which formed the exit behind her, and running forward put both her arms about his neck.

"Oh! my saint, my dear old saint, don't take it to heart so," she cried imploringly. And at the sound of her voice, the voice that

was dearer to him than any other in all the world, he lifted his head and smiled up at her, a loving, reassuring smile.

"I am not taking it to heart," he said. "I was a little bit hipped, that's all."

"You don't think that I acted wrongly?" queried Jill diffidently. "You are not vexed that I declined his offer for baby?"

"Good Lord, no!" he answered vehemently. "I could never have reconciled myself to giving the little beggar up. We managed very well without him before he came, Jill dear; but we couldn't manage now after once having him, could we? You did what was right as I knew you would. In any serious matter I should invariably leave the decision to you."

"How good you are to me, Jack," she whispered gratefully. "How unselfish! It doesn't seem fair that you should have had to give up so much for me. And now comes this fresh trouble. We have had one or two worries, haven't we dear?"

"Yes," he answered brightly, rising, and putting his arm protectingly around her waist, "we have, but fortunately we are both sufficiently self-respecting, and single-purposed to trust one another implicitly, and so the worries don't affect us very much. Some people would have magnified them into tragedies, but we have managed to shake them off somehow, and come up smiling. So long as we have each other, and health—"

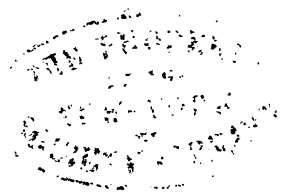
"And Baby," supplemented Jill.

"And Baby, of course; there is nothing much we need worry about. The business manages to keep on its feet somehow; I think one day it may possibly even walk."

"You are brave and confident," Jill whispered a little wistfully, "but you will never be well off now dear."

And St. John with his arm still round her, drew her nearer to him and kissed her upon the lips. The feeling of sadness had passed, a deep happiness and contentment had risen in its place.

"I *am* well off," he answered. "No man, whatever his social standing or the size of his banking account, could be better off. I wouldn't swop you and the boy, Jill, for the untold wealth of the world."



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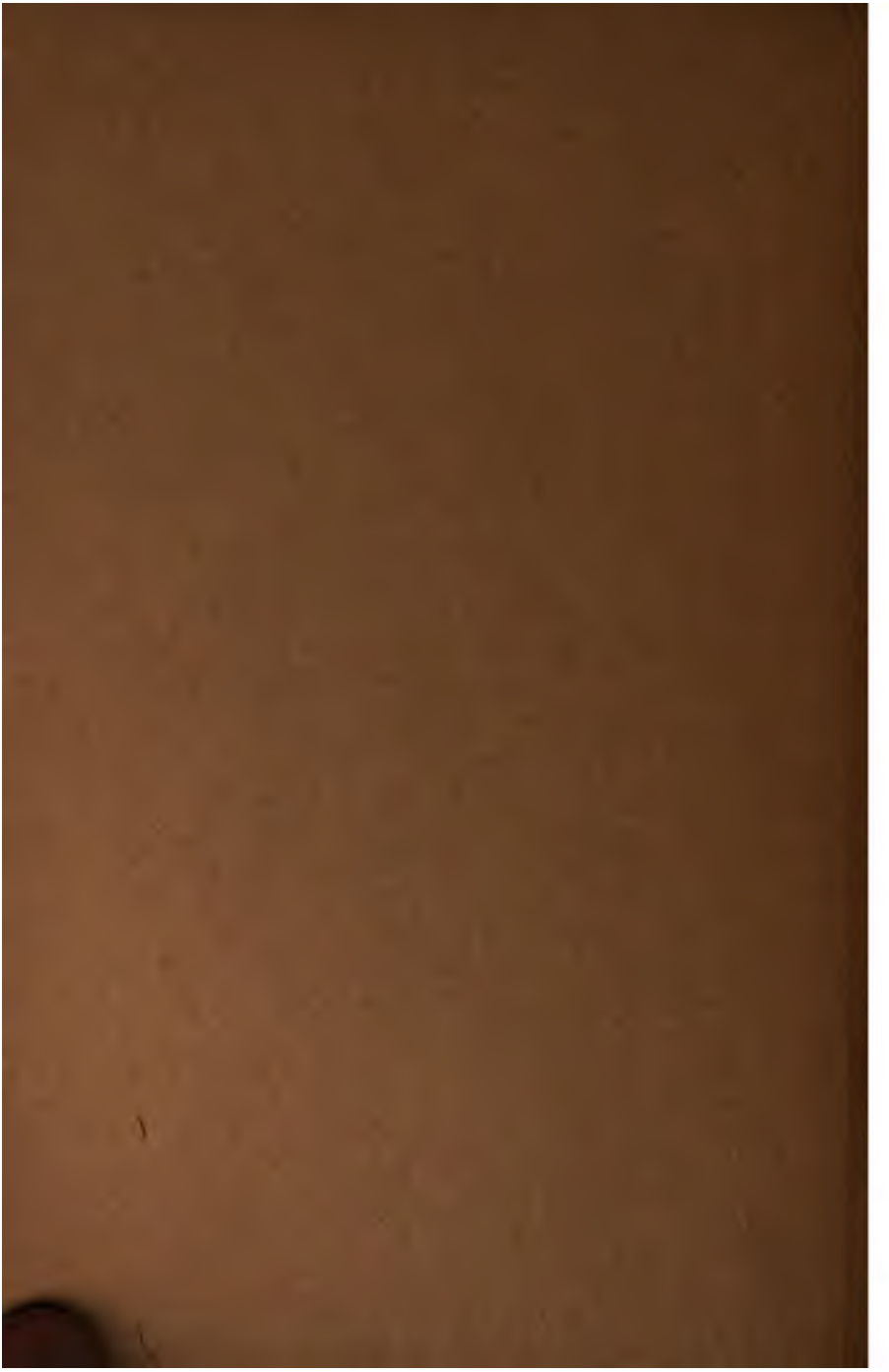
WOODFALL AND KINDER, PRINTERS, LONG ACRE, LONDON.